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EVERY WEEKDAY

Nato sends in the bombers

Serbs facing attack as talks fail

By MICHAEL EVANS
DEFENCE EDITOR

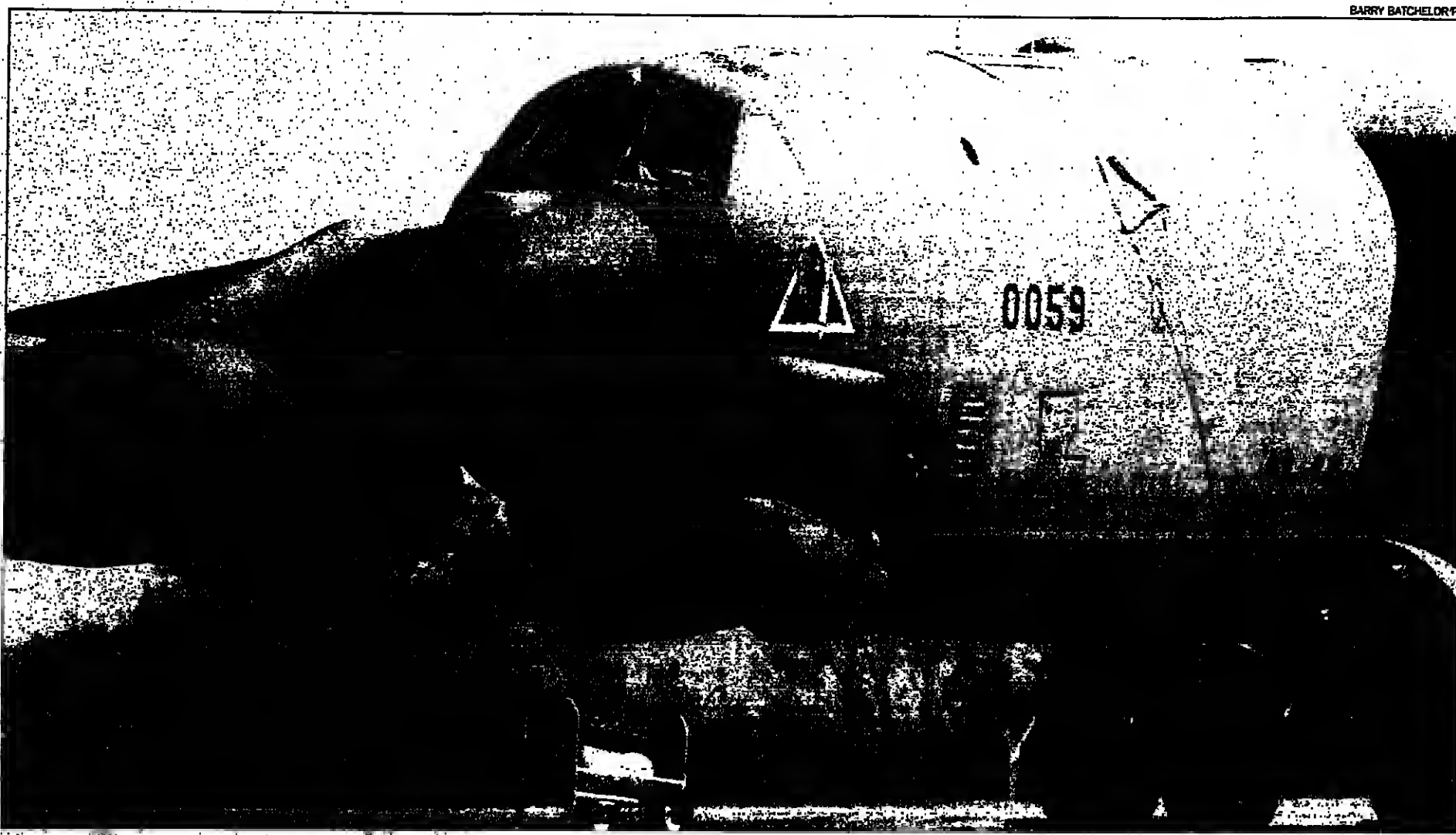
NATO was preparing last night for massive missile strikes on Yugoslavia as part of what could be the largest military operation in Nato's 50-year history.

After the failure of the last-minute talks in Belgrade between President Milosevic and the American envoy Richard Holbrooke, warships and aircraft armed with cruise missiles were given a countdown for the first phase of the air strikes, and 350 Nato planes were ready for widespread bombing.

Although the Serb Parliament in Belgrade gave the first indication that it might consider an international peace force in Kosovo, the Yugoslav leader's refusal to end the current wave of oppression, appeared to seal the country's fate. Yugoslavia last night declared a state of emergency.

With President Clinton giving the strongest indication that the order for airstrikes had already been given, Yevgeni Primakov, the Russian Foreign Minister, cancelled his planned trip to Washington. Russia remained bitterly opposed to bombing.

Mr Clinton said the US should pray for the pilots who would be facing imminent danger and prepared his country for likely casualties. In an impassioned speech to local government workers, he compared the Serb assault on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo to Nazi atrocities and asked how



A B52 bomber secured behind the wire at RAF Fairford, where it was on standby for action over Kosovo after the collapse of peace talks yesterday

many lives would have been saved "if people had listened to Churchill and stood up to Hitler earlier".

"Nato is united and prepared to carry out its warning. If President Milosevic is not prepared to make peace, then we are willing to limit his ability to make war on the Kosovars," he said.

Tony Blair also made an ominous statement. "We have no alternative but to act and act we will, unless Milosevic even now chooses the path of peace," he said. The aim of airstrikes would be to stop the Serb forces from their violent oppression in Kosovo, which was driving thousands from their homes. Only military ac-

tion, he said, could avert a "humanitarian catastrophe".

After his failed talks with Mr Milosevic, Mr Holbrooke said the Yugoslav leader fully understood the potential consequences of his refusal to sign a peace settlement. The situation was "the bleakest since we began this effort almost four years ago", he said. Mr Milosevic had "not wished to discuss either a ceasefire or a Nato-led force in a serious manner".

He predicted, however, that Mr Milosevic had misjudged the effects of his defiance. "History, not today's headlines, will record the full consequences of what happened today."

As Mr Holbrooke left to brief Nato ambassadors in

'What happens if bombing does not work? That question summed up the complicated divisions at Westminster: outrage, apprehension, uncertainty'

— Peter Riddell, page 6

Brussels about the meeting, departing Yugoslav diplomats claimed that any war with Nato could drag Albania into the conflict. They also predicted future conflict between Serbia and

the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which closed its border with Serbia yesterday, as thousands of Albanians attempted to flee south. There are 12,000 Nato troops in Macedonia and there were fears

that they could become targets for Serb retaliation.

However, Mr Blair said that if Nato took no action and the oppression of Kosovo were allowed to continue, the Serbs would have no restraints on their actions. "The consequences of that would be absolutely devastating," he said.

His stance won broad support from both Opposition parties, although William Hague sought assurances that no ground troops would be used.

In Rome, the Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini gave Italian senators explicit details of Nato's bombing plans. The first strikes on Serbian and Yugoslav military targets would come from warships, he said.

There would then be a pause followed by airstrikes which would "wipe out" the Serb military capability to operate in Kosovo.

Last night Serbs who have been living under the almost constant threat of airstrikes for the past six months, were at last succumbing to a bout of panic shopping, with most stores reporting shortages of staples and canned products. **Additional reporting by Ben Macintyre, Tom Walker, Roland Watson and Ian Brodie**

Drugs money link, page 4
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MPs divide, page 6
Simon Jenkins, page 20

Belgrade calls up vital 'Dads Army'

FROM TOM WALKER
IN BELGRADE

HUNDREDS of thousands of men under 58 — a veritable Serb "Dad's Army" — were ordered to mobilise by President Milosevic of Yugoslavia yesterday, part of his final preparations for a war with Nato.

The move could bolster the regular fighting strength of 114,000 to nearly a million men under arms, more than the country had during its war with Croatia. However, widespread desertion makes it unlikely that figure will be met.

The call up came as the Serb leader tightened his grip over the military by sacking Alexander Dimitrijevic, the army's head of intelligence and internal security. He was replaced by an ethnic Hungarian loyal to the Milosevic regime, Lieutenant General Giza Farkas.

Western military observers called the army competent by Balkan standards, but "in a fourth division" compared to Nato. In Belgrade last night the few diplomats remaining packed their bags and admitted the general's dismissal confirmed their worst fears for Yugoslavia's future.



"We are prepared for war"

Law lords' ruling set to boost Pinochet's hopes

By FRANCES GIBB AND JOANNA BALE

GENERAL Pinochet's bid for freedom will receive a major boost today when the highest court in the land rules that he cannot be made to stand trial for crimes of murder and torture allegedly committed before 1988.

At the same time the seven law lords are expected to rule by five to two that he has no immunity from prosecution for crimes after that date.

Their two-part ruling will effectively wipe out all but three of 30 specimen charges submitted by the Spanish Government which is seeking the former dictator's extradition, although it still leaves some crimes of murder and torture to be answered for.

It will also pave the way for the general's lawyers to

launch a legal challenge to the decision by Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, last December to authorise extradition proceedings.

Such a decision would mean the former dictator languishing for at least several more months in his rented mansion in Westworth, Surrey, where he is under house arrest, as his lawyers seek to block extradition proceedings on the strength of the new ruling.

But yesterday his supporters were taking steps in anticipation of an even more optimistic outcome: the general's aircraft jet is due to land today at RAF Brize Norton, Oxfordshire, just hours before the 200-page judgment is delivered at 2pm.

The crew would have plenty

of time to refuel and restock with fresh food in the event — thought unlikely — that a decision went completely in the general's favour and he is held to be immune from extradition proceedings.

In that event, lawyers would have to go through the lengthy reasons given by each of the law lords — and then return to Bow Street magistrates' court to have bail conditions lifted.

But the law lords' ruling is not expected to remove the threat of extradition altogether.

Rather it is likely to pave the way for fresh legal actions, with General Pinochet's lawyers launching an immediate judicial review of the decision by the Home Secretary to give

Continued on page 2

Family's £3m fraud plot

A family of nine faked car crashes and disability in a plot to claim £3 million in damages and benefits. They gathered about £500,000 before an insurance company became suspicious... Page 3

£1,000 fine for bus lane abuse

Motorists who block bus lanes will be fined up to £1,000 in a campaign to improve services. Cameras will be installed on buses and at roadblocks to record offending drivers... Page 9

Beloff dies

Lord Beloff, the professor of government who became a leading light of the Thatcherite New Right, has died aged 85... Page 23
Leading article... Page 21

IRA killers to go free as Straw loses in court

By MARTIN FLETCHER, CHIEF IRELAND CORRESPONDENT

JACK STRAW'S attempt to block the release of four IRA terrorists backfired last night. Thomas Quigley, Paul Kavanagh and Gerard McDonnell, who had all been jailed for their parts in bombing campaigns in England, were expected to walk free late last night after a judge rejected Mr Straw's efforts to stop their release.

Two dozen Sinn Féin protesters had gathered outside Belfast's High Court as the Home Office began its efforts to overturn Monday's decision by the independent Sentence Review Commission that the three should be released yesterday, and Patrick Magee, the Brighton bomber, in June.

Mr Justice Paul Girvan rejected the commissioners' plea

for more time to prepare their case, but ruled that the Home Office lawyers had until midnight to persuade him, and if necessary an appeals court, that the Commissioners were wrong. If they failed the trio would immediately be freed — and in the end, the judge threw out Mr Straw's case.

Gerry Adams had earlier denounced the Home Secretary's intervention as a "vindictive and petty and stupid" saying it would cause deep anger. The Irish Government also expressed surprise and demanded clarification from London.

Urgent efforts to break the deadlock over IRA disarmament before next week's deadline made no headway at all, and a small bomb planted by a loyalist splinter group in Cas-

lewellan, Co Down, added to the deepening pessimism.

David Trimble met Mr Adams but said he no longer saw any sign of the flexibility the Sinn Féin president promised in Washington last week. "We heard yet again a simple reiteration of their position," Decommissioning was "not something they can do but something the Republican movement won't do".

Martin McGuinness, Sinn Féin's chief negotiator, declared: "It's impossible to get the IRA to do anything in relation to a gesture, timetabling or shedding against a background of the messing around we have seen over the course of the last 10 months."

Leading article, page 21

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Blair's trumpet call echoes with an uncertain sound

As the Good Book says, "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to battle?" Yesterday's parliamentary fanfare for a Nato attack on Serbia struck a ragged note. That had not been the Prime Minister's hope. Tony's trumpet was clear and bold, read almost lip-smackingly slowly. But from all around came silence. A couple of feeble early cheers petered out. Even at his peroration ("I hope the House will join me...") the

cheers never reached more than 4 on the Richter Hear-Hear scale. Tories sat on their hands. What could this mean? Grim sobriety? "Not an occasion for jingoism", etc? Some backbenchers were, it is true, gravely resolute. But others simply doubted. The unsettled mood emerged as MPs rose to question Blair. The Tory leader led the confusion, for it was hard to know quite what William Hague meant. After a tedious raking-over the past, he seemed to mention — almost as an aside

— that the Government would not have Tory support for a ground attack. Surprised whispers rustled across both sides. Liberal Democrats are now the War Party. A portentous Menzies Campbell called this "a bad business which could turn out to be a bloody one" and seemed rather in favour of it. He thought ground troops might be necessary. Blair had no comment on that. Labour's Donald Anderson (chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee) wanted to know about ground attack too. Blair had no comment beyond remarking that the difficulty was that "up to 100,000" might be needed.

Alex Salmond, leader of the Scottish National Party, tried again. Still no comment — but Blair now thought it "possible" that "more than 100,000" might be needed. Michael



MATTHEW PARRIS
POLITICAL SKETCH

Colvin (C. Ramsey) thought the figure twice that. The Prime Minister now agreed "it would be more than 100,000". Unsettling to watch a Prime Minister virtually declaring war, his estimates of troop numbers rising according to the last person he has spoken to, flanked on one side by Rob-

in Cook wearing a frankly loopy expression, on the other a scowling John Prescott yelling: "What would you do? Just sit and watch the murders on telly?" Now Blair was parrying questions about troops with an insistence that bombing alone would do the trick. Some Labour MPs backed him. Walsall seems solid for war: David Winnick (Walsall N), a sort of socialist Empire Loyalist, squeaked aggression: Bruce George (Walsall S) wanted guarantees for Macedonia, too. Others too — a

majority — were for bombing. But by no means all. Tony Bena and Tam Dalyell's doubts came as no surprise. Kevin McNamara and Alice Mahon were less expected deserters from the on-message battalion. Mrs Mahon's voice trembled — though whether in fear of the Serbs or the whips was unclear. Almost every Tory wanted the answer to McNamara's "what if bombing fails?" They thought Milosevic (who, like Hitler, has now lost his "Mr" at Westminster) could only be

Brown faces inquiry over 'fiddled' figures

Roland Watson and Alasdair Murray on claims of a misleading Budget

THE Treasury select committee is to investigate claims that Gordon Brown misled voters about the impact of the Budget by ignoring the abolition of mortgage interest tax relief in his overall figures.

The cross-party committee asked Mr Brown to reply in writing after he was accused of evading the issue during a heated appearance before the group of MPs yesterday.

The Chancellor rejected charges that he had "fiddled" the Budget figures to allow him to trumpet a tax-raising package as one that saved money for households.

But opposition parties seized on independent figures that suggest the Budget will raise taxes by £100 million over three years rather than cut it by £45 billion, as repeatedly asserted by both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor. The Tories are likely to return to the issue at question time today when John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, will be standing in for Mr Blair, who is at the Berlin EU summit.

At the heart of the argument is a complex dispute over the accountancy treatment of two of Mr Brown's major Budget reforms in recent years, the abolition of Mortgage Interest Rate Relief (MIRAS) and the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC).

Mr Brown's assertion that the Budget will reduce net tax-

es by £45 million only stands up if the WFTC is treated as a reduction in tax. The Office for National Statistics has ruled that it should instead be treated as £1.5 billion worth of higher government social spending because it is effectively replacing the old Family Credit. Mr Brown, though, has ignored the office.

He is also claiming that the abolition of MIRAS should be treated as a reduction in public spending rather than a £2.75 billion tax increase. Although this accountancy treatment is in line with European standards, it goes against Mr Brown's practice in Opposition of including the previous

government's limiting of Miras in his lists of "22 Tory tax rises".

The opposition leapt on the accounting details, turning Mr Brown's taunting of the previous Tory government back on him. Both the Tories and Liberal Democrats said that voters would never be able to trust the Chancellor on tax again, a line borrowed directly from Mr Brown when he was Shadow Chancellor.

Malcolm Bruce, the Liberal Democrat spokesman, said: "To try to pretend today that further cuts in mortgage tax relief are not tax rises is beyond belief."

Mr Bruce said that yesterday's revelations were "inconsistent, dishonest and cynical". "This latest abuse of statistics is a spin too far. It shows just how far this government is prepared to go to mislead people about taxation," he said.

Francis Maude, the Shadow Chancellor, accused both Mr Brown and Mr Blair of having lied about the effect of the Budget, adding that the Chancellor had "added insult to injury" by ducking questions from the committee.

Mr Maude said: "Gordon Brown's contempt for Parliament, not to mention taxpayers, knows no bounds. Even faced with unequivocal proof that taxes are rising, he swore that black was white." Mr Brown came under fire at yesterday's select committee from David Ruffley, the Tory MP for Bury St Edmunds and a former adviser to Kenneth Clarke, who said the Chancellor's treatment of the issues was "dishonest". Mr Ruffley used figures from the House of Commons library to argue that the Budget would increase taxes by £100 million over the next three years.

Following the exchanges, the committee asked Mr Brown to respond to its points in writing.

A Treasury spokesman said: "The key point is that we are putting £6 billion into the economy, and £4 billion of that will be reduced tax bills."

POINTS OF CONTENTION

Five other things the Chancellor did not make clear in his Budget speech:

- 1 Failed to mention the abolition of the 20p tax band.
- 2 Omitted to mention the end of tax relief for maintenance payments for the children of a broken marriage.
- 3 Claimed pensioners could claim up to £15,000 pa tax free. Accountants, however, believe that this figure is based on such a complex set of allowances and income levels that no one will ever qualify.
- 4 Suggested pensioners will benefit from the 10p tax reform. But few pensioners actually pay tax and for those who do much of the income comes from savings, which will continue to be taxed at the savings rate of 20p.
- 5 There is a year's gap between the abolition of the married couple's allowance and the introduction of the children's tax credit, which went unexplained.



Crosses with the names of Chile's 'disappeared' at Parliament Square yesterday

Continued from page 1

the go-ahead to extradition proceedings. They will also renew their fight against extradition when proceedings begin at Bow Street. A date may be set on April 6, the next date on which the general is due to return for a bail hearing.

Critical to the law lords' latest ruling is thought to be the argument not aired before the previ-

Pinochet

ous panel of five — on the definition of an extradition crime. The question is whether the crimes alleged were extraditable in law and whether the crimes have to be ones that are extraditable at the time they were committed both in the for-

eign country and the requesting state as General Pinochet's lawyers argued; or whether, as the Spanish Government and the Crown Prosecution Service argued, it was enough for the crime to be one which is now extraditable in the requesting state.

It could be autumn before formal extradition proceedings start at Bow Street.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MPs join campaign for elected chamber

Tony Blair was given a blunt warning yesterday by almost a third of all backbenchers, including 60 Labour MPs, that he should scrap plans to fill a reformed House of Lords with appointees.

In a rare display of cross-party action, 131 MPs backed a Commons motion demanding that the second chamber be elected by the people.

The Government gave a strong hint in its Lords reform White Paper in January that ministers wanted a largely nominated second chamber with a small indirectly elected element. The Royal Commission on Lords reform today publishes a consultation paper of possible options for reform and start taking evidence.

The campaign is being organised by Andrew Tyrie, Tory MP for Chichester, and Mark Fisher (Lab, Stoke Central), and Charles Kennedy, the Liberal Democrat leadership contender.

Cot deaths link

More than 100 cot deaths a year are caused by passive smoking, according to a campaign. A Gallup survey, for the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths, found that only 7 per cent of those questioned linked smoking to cot deaths and only 25 per cent thought it affected children's health. The poll of 2,000 people is the start of a campaign, "Smoking: Give up for Kids".

Labour protest

Election candidates for Labour's ruling national executive could be blocked from running if they complain to the press about the way the ballot is conducted. A code of conduct approved by a majority of the NEC yesterday includes a new complaints procedure under which candidates are expected to refer any protest about the election: not protest in public.

Tessa's sex talk

Tessa Jowell, the Health Minister, blamed many adults' immature attitude towards sex for Britain having the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe. She told the Family Planning Association's annual conference in London: "We confuse them with mixed messages about sex. They could be forgiven for not knowing clearly if sex is supposed to be compulsory or illegal."

Bus-trap girl dies

A girl aged 14 died after her clothes were caught in the closing doors of a bus in Peterborough. Sarah Nelson, a pupil at the city's Stanground College, suffered head injuries as she was dragged along the ground for a few feet. The driver and five passengers were treated for severe shock. Police believe that a cord from the girl's coat may have become trapped.

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Disgraced ex-MP accused of smears

BY MARK INGLEFIELD
POLITICAL REPORTER

LABOUR's attempts to conceal bitter splits in its Newark party were hindered yesterday by fresh criticism of Fiona Jones, the disgraced ex-MP.

As the National Executive Committee suspended the local party after Jones's conviction for electoral fraud, one of her former local rivals called for a further investigation of her affairs.

Gill Dawn, the former leader of Newark and Sherwood District Council, claimed that Jones instigated a smear campaign against her to detract from her own troubles. She told *The Times* yesterday that the regional party needed "shutting down and then furnishing" because of its failure to investigate Jones.

"There should be a thorough investigation to look at why the complaints against Fiona Jones were ignored," she said.

Jones, 42, was unavailable for comment. Her appeal against conviction should be heard next month, with the by-election expected on May 6.

Racist police face sack in move to fight prejudice

BY RICHARD FORD, HOME CORRESPONDENT

POLICE officers found to have used racist language or behaviour face dismissal from the service as part of the Government's drive to implement most of the 70 recommendations in the Stephen Lawrence report.

Jack Straw unveiled a 38-page action plan yesterday and said: "We know we must deliver real practical change. The focus of this plan is mainly about improvements in policing, because that was the focus of the inquiry, but progress on policing must be part of a wider context."

He promised a series of speeches from ministers during the next few months in which they will outline how they plan to build an anti-racist society.

While accepting most of the proposals made by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny's inquiry, Mr Straw made clear that the Government had serious reservations about key proposals and advised caution on several others. But he said that the Race Relations Act will be

reformed in the next session of Parliament to bring the police under race discrimination laws. He also promised a feasibility study into setting up a fully independent complaints system to investigate allegations against the police.

But the Home Secretary moved to defuse the most controversial aspects of the report by Sir William. The action plan said that the Government had "serious reservations" about the proposal to make it a criminal offence to utter racist comments in private.

Mr Straw rejected the plan to make schools publish league tables of the number of racist incidents in the classroom.

Sir William, who chaired the inquiry and wrote the report, said: "I'm very happy with the way in which the plan will take forward the recommendations set out in our report. The overall aim is the elimination of prejudice and disadvantage and the demonstration of fairness in all of policy."

IRA prisoners' longest day

Martin Fletcher on the four men whose release was challenged

THOMAS QUIGLEY, Paul Kavanagh and Gerard McDonnell have between them served more than 15,000 days in prison for IRA terrorist offences, but not one as long as yesterday.

The trio should have been free men by mid-morning. Instead they and their families waited well into the evening while Home Office lawyers sought to persuade a Belfast court that they should be detained for another 16 months.

For a fourth prisoner, the Brighton bomber Patrick Magee, the hearing would determine whether he was released in June or in 16 months' time.

Slain Fen representatives in the court sent out regular updates by mobile telephone, and it was a day of excruciating tension for the prisoners,

but then there would be little sympathy for them back in England where they were sent in the 1980s to bomb and murder.

Magee, 48, is the most notorious. It was he in 1984 who planted the bomb in Room 629 of Brighton's Grand Hotel that 24 days later nearly killed Margaret Thatcher and much of her Cabinet. He was given eight life sentences in 1986 and the judge at his trial labelled him a "man of exceptional cruelty and inhumanity".

Kavanagh and Quigley, both aged 43 and from republican families in West Belfast, were each given five life sen-

tences in 1985 for a bombing campaign in London in 1981 that killed at least three people.

They were responsible for the Chelsea Barracks nail bomb which killed two passers-by, a 59-year-old widow and a male teenager, and for an explosion in an Oxford Street Wimpy bar that killed a bomb disposal officer.

They were also convicted of causing explosions at Debenhams in Oxford Street, and at the home in Wimbledon, South London, of Sir Michael Havers, then the Attorney-General.

The two refused to stand up

as Mr Justice McCowan passed sentence. He told them: "You showed not a spark of compassion for these people. You cannot therefore be surprised if society thinks you are not fit to be at liberty for a very long time to come." He set their tariffs — minimum terms — at 35 years which David Waddington, the then Home Secretary, increased to 50.

McDonnell, 49, and a cousin of Gerry Adams, was convicted with Magee in 1986 for his part in an IRA plot to bomb a dozen English seaside resorts.

He escaped from the Maze in 1983, was recaptured two years later, and subsequently received £3,108 in compensation for property damaged in the aftermath of the escape.

Fake injuries that cost the state a fortune were revealed when insurers became suspicious



Family of fraudsters: Mohammed Sharif, left, the father who concocted the plan; Zulfiqar Sharif and Razia Ahmed, who made large claims; Arif Sharif, Abid Sharif, Yasmin Sarwar and Abdul Rashid

£3m plot by the family that lived on fraud

By ADRIAN LEE

NINE members of the same family faked car crashes and serious disability as part of an elaborate plot to claim £3 million from insurance companies and benefits agencies.

For years, Zulfiqar Sharif and his sister Razia Ahmed were said to be in persistent vegetative states. He claimed £1.75 million compensation for a street attack. She sought £450,000 from an insurance company after a road accident.

Home videos showed them leading normal lives. Ahmed, 24, was filmed walking out of a hospital proudly carrying her new baby. Her brother, 28, who was filmed driving and running down the street.

Preston Crown Court heard that the crimes of their father, Mohammed Sharif, 57, and his relatives, from Preston and Blackburn, had been traced by investigators over almost two decades. They defrauded insurance companies, benefit agencies and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. They are conservatively estimated to have netted almost £500,000 before an insurance company stopped them.

According to the prosecution, it was "a vast conspiracy".



Zulfiqar Sharif filmed while working out

and almost the entire family were involved.

As sentencing was adjourned for four weeks, it was calculated that the bill for the trial would reach £2.75 million. Some of the defendants claimed legal aid towards the £8 barristers involved in the case.

The Sharif family owns 13 properties in Lancashire and runs two profitable general stores, the court heard. After police began arrests, £211,000 was transferred from British bank accounts to Pakistan.

After a genuine car accident

Mohammed Sharif realised that thousands of pounds could be generated by staging accidents. Thenceforward, family members threw themselves into the paths of cars driven by relatives, the court was told. The only independent witness was often a relative who used a false name.

The fraud began to unravel when the suspicious insurance company employed investigators who watched Ahmed. Police then seized the videos.

The trial was frequently stopped to allow nappies worn by Zulfiqar, which he said he wore for incontinence caused by his injuries, to be changed. He stooped in the dock, his life apparently ruined. But, said prosecutors, the videos showed it was a sham. He had received an interim payment of £47,000 from the compensation board.

The family claimed Zulfiqar had been confused with a relative, an illegal immigrant who had fled to Pakistan.

Also before the court were Mohammed Sharif's other sons, Arif, 27, and Abid, 21, and his other daughters, Parveen Sharif, 30, and Yasmin Sarwar, 24. His sons-in-law Abdul Rashid, 31, and Sian Ahmed, 43, were also found guilty of conspiracy to defraud. Another son-in-law, Mohammed Ramzan, 36, was acquitted.

Mrs Justice Steel told the family that they faced jail. Addressing Mohammed Sharif, who was remanded pending sentence, she said: "I have no hesitation in thinking you will seek to manipulate the sentencing procedure either by illness — real or fake — or attempting to leave the country."

The court heard that Arif claimed to be mentally subnormal, claiming more than £150 week in benefit, but ran a successful retail business, called Arif Superstore.

The family was helped by the apparent willingness of the medical authorities to accept their injuries, the court heard.

Other members of the family, who also received payments, are believed to have fled to Pakistan.

Speaking after the case, one of the police officers involved said: "They are a collection of fakes, prepared to act out any illness, incapacity or accident in their greed for money." It is believed that at least seven road accidents were staged.



Zulfiqar Sharif being helped away from the court by a friend. He claimed he was wheelchair-bound

Tougher check on benefit cheats

By ALEXANDRA FREAN
SOCIAL AFFAIRS
CORRESPONDENT

THE Government is to crack down on cheats who use dead people's national insurance numbers to claim state benefits.

Computer checks will also be introduced to detect people whose national insurance numbers appear both on company payrolls and on benefit claim forms.

Alistair Darling, the Social Security Secretary, unveiled the measures yesterday in a new document, *A New Contract for Welfare — Safeguarding Social Security*, that aims to reduce the estimated £2 billion to £5 billion worth of fraudulent or incorrect benefit claims made each year.

Procedures are to be introduced to check new activity on dormant national insurance accounts. There is also to be stricter security surrounding the issuing of new national insurance numbers and the weeding out of old numbers. Officials will demand proof of identity for all claimants and will accept only originals of documents such as birth certificates. The changes follow research showing that more than one in five national insurance numbers in use may be fake.

FAMILY FORTUNES: WHO CLAIMED WHAT

Mohammed Sharif, 57, father of the fraudsters, arrived in Britain from Pakistan in 1975. He has been claiming disability living allowance (£55.43) and income support (£55.43) since 1981. He was sentenced to four years in prison in 1997 for conspiracy to defraud. **Zulfiqar Sharif**, 28, Mohammed's son, is also claiming disability living allowance (£55.43), income support (£55.43) and housing benefit (£50). He received interim payment of £47,000 from Criminal Injuries Compensation Board after being attacked on street at age of 15. Outstanding claim of more than £2.5 million. **Arif Sharif**, 27, another son, claiming income support (£55.43), housing benefit (£50), and housing allowance (£50). **Abid Sharif**, 21, another son, who was claiming disability allowance (£55.43), housing benefit (£50), and incapacity allowance (£50). **Razia Ahmed**, 24, daughter of Mohammed and a mother of four, was claiming disability allowance (£55.43), housing allowance (£50), and housing benefit (£50). Car accident insurance claim of £450,000 triggered investigation into family. **Parveen Sharif**, 30, another daughter, was claiming disability allowance (£55.43), housing benefit (£50), and incapacity allowance (£50). **Yasmin Sarwar**, 24, another daughter, was claiming housing benefit (£50), disability allowance (£55.43), and incapacity benefit (£50). **Abdul Rashid**, 31, son-in-law of Mohammed, was claiming disability allowance (£55.43), housing benefit (£50), and housing allowance (£50). **Sian Ahmed**, 43, son-in-law, was claiming disability allowance (£55.43) and housing benefit (£50).

Sawoniuk in walkout threat over SS claim

By TIM JONES

SHAKING with rage, the pensioner accused of war crimes threatened to storm out of the witness box yesterday as he was questioned about his alleged membership of the Waffen SS.

Anthony Sawoniuk told Sir John Nutting, QC, for the prosecution: "It is nonsense. Don't ask me about the German army or I am going."

His outburst came as Sir John questioned him over a German army document that purported to show he had been a member of the Waffen Border SS in 1944. "I hate the Germans and I hate the Russians. They are the people who destroyed the Polish population," Mr Sawoniuk said.

Earlier, asked whether ten days after the September 1942 massacre of 2,900 Jews in Donatochevo, Belarus, he had killed children, he said: "Absolute lies. I never killed a child in my life."

Mr Sawoniuk, 78, of Bermondsey, southeast London, denies two charges of murder. The trial, at the Old Bailey, continues.

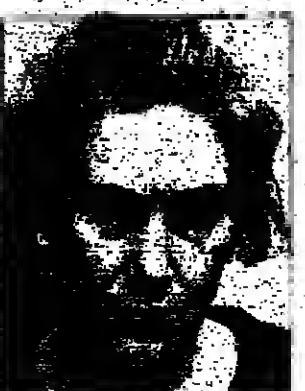
Woman smoked joint as river girls drowned

By RUSSELL JENKINS

A WOMAN was sharing a cannabis joint with two boys on a dangerous riverbank when two eight-year-old girls drowned in her care.

The girls, Charlesa Fox and Jasmine Neville, were non-swimmers but were heard to shout, "Let's play Baywatch" before they disappeared in the River Wharfe at Arthington, near Otley, West Yorkshire.

Leeds Crown Court was told yesterday that Wendy Dodd, 41, was high on drink



Wendy Dodd: left in charge of the children

and drugs, and unaware of the children's distress as she sunbathed in bra and cut-off shorts with two boys from a nearby travellers' camp. Vital minutes were lost because she told police that the girls had wandered off. Police called a helicopter and tracker dogs instead of frogmen.

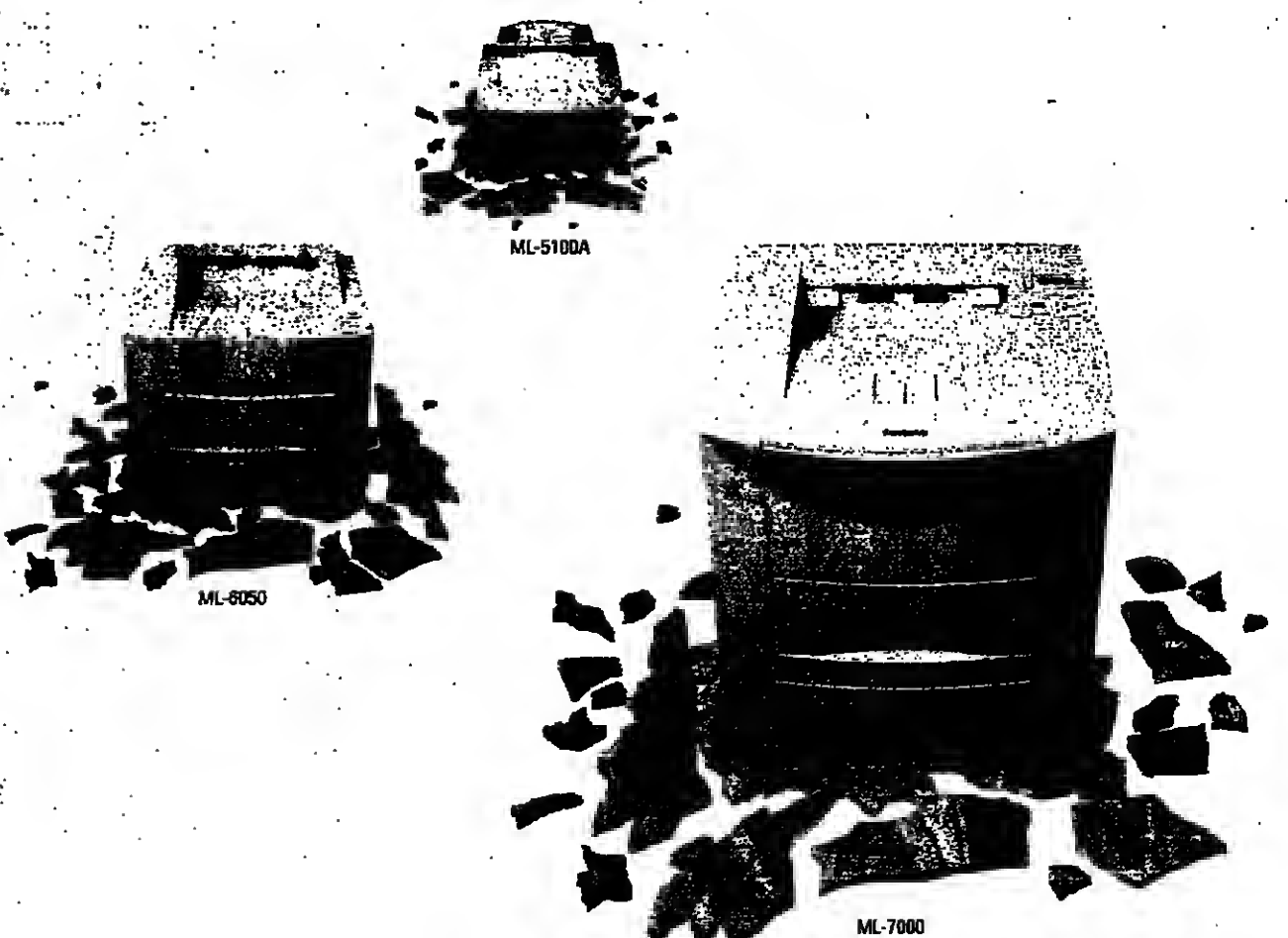
Mrs Dodd, formerly of Burley, Leeds, had denied manslaughter, and was allowed to plead guilty to lesser charges of wilful neglect amounting to cruelty. Sentencing was adjourned for medical and psychiatric reports.

James Stewart, QC, for the prosecution, said that a riverbank barbecue was planned by David and Maxine Fox, Charlesa's parents, to celebrate her eighth birthday. When the couple returned to Leeds, Mrs Dodd was left in charge.

A woman heard one child say: "Let's play Baywatch and you rescue me." At the same time, two "gypsy boys", aged about 15 and 12, were talking to Mrs Dodd from the other side off the river. She invited them for a "split".

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Drugs money linked to the Kosovo rebels

FROM ROGER BOYES AND
ESKE WRIGHT IN BONN

THE Kosovo Liberation Army, which has won the support of the West for its guerrilla struggle against the heavy armour of the Serbs, is a Marxist-led force funded by dubious sources, including drug money.

That is the judgment of senior police officers across Europe. An investigation by *The Times* has established that police forces in three West European countries, together with Europol, are separately investigating growing evidence that drug money is funding the KLA's leap from obscurity to power.

The financing of the Kosovo guerrilla war poses critical questions and it sorely tests claims to an "ethical" foreign policy. Should the West back a guerrilla army that appears to be partly financed by organised crime? Could the KLA's need for funds be fuelling the heroin trade across Europe?

The KLA has become an essential component of the Kosovo peace agreement: without it, there would be no equal negotiating partner for the Belgrade Government. In military terms, it is in no sense equal to the Serb forces. But it

THE KLA

has grown from a theoretical notion to an often successful, very mobile and very visible guerrilla grouping in a remarkably short time.

Much of the money funding the KLA is believed to come from legitimate sources — raised by the People's Movement of Kosovo (LPK), which is the political wing of the resistance movement.

There are about 500,000

'Drug routes are used for weapons'

Kosovan Albanians in Western Europe who send money back home because it funds healthcare for their cousins. However, some of this cash is believed to be siphoned off for the military.

As well as diverting charitable donations from exiled Kosovans, some of the KLA money is thought to come from drug dealing.

Sweden is investigating suspicions of a KLA drug connection.

"We have intelligence leading us to believe that there could be a connection between drug money and the Kosovo Liberation Army," said Walter Kege, head of the drug enforcement unit in the Swedish police intelligence service.

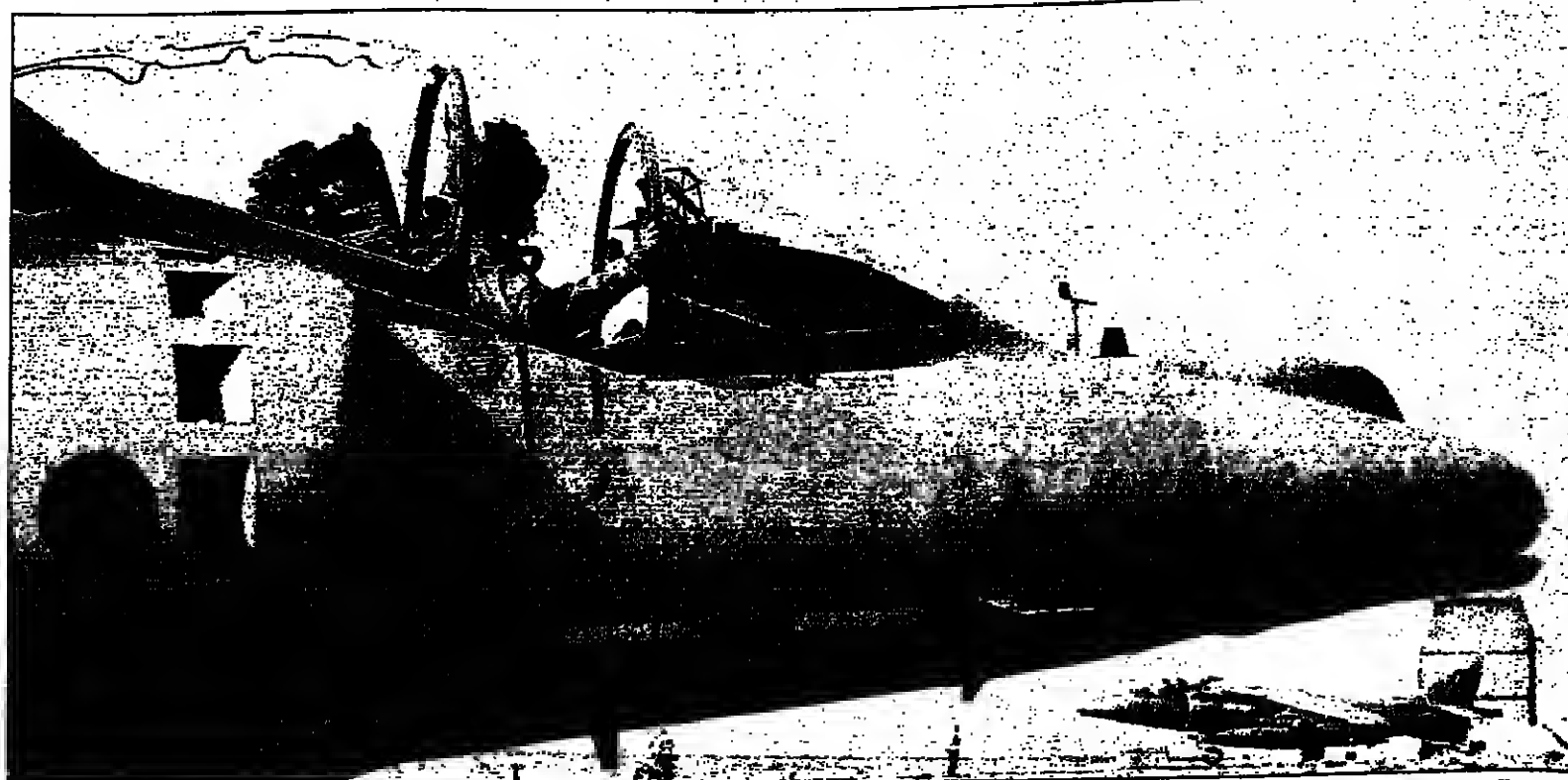
Supporting intelligence has come from other states. "We have yet to find direct evidence, but our experience tells us that the channels for trading hard drugs are also used for weapons," said one Swiss police commander.

An official in the Bavarian Interior Ministry also told *The Times* of a recent fundraising meeting involving some 200 Kosovans in southern Germany. "At the end of the session they raised DM100,000 [about £40,000]."

This represents a huge sum for ordinary Kosovans and fuels speculation that apparently legitimate fundraising activities are used to launder dirty money.

One Western intelligence report quoted by *Berliner Zeitung* says that DM900 million has reached Kosovo since the guerrillas began operations and half the sum is said to be illegal drug money.

In particular, European countries are investigating the Albanian connection: whether



Two Harrier GR7s from No 1 Squadron at RAF Wittering taxi along the runway at the Gioia del Colle airbase in Italy in readiness for airstrikes

Kosovan Albanians living primarily in Germany and Switzerland are creaming off the profits from inner-city heroin dealing and sending the cash to the KLA.

Albania — which plays a key role in channelling money to the Kosovans — is at the hub of Europe's drug trade. An intelligence report prepared by Germany's Federal Criminal Agency concluded: "Ethnic Albanians are now the most prominent group in the distribution of heroin in Western consumer countries."

Europol, the European police authority based in The Hague, is preparing a report for European interior and justice ministers on a connection between the KLA and Albanian drug gangs.

Czech police recently track-

ed down a Kosovo Albanian drug dealer named Doboshi, who had escaped from a Norwegian prison where he was serving 12 years for heroin trading. A raid on Doboshi's apartment turned up documents linking him with arms purchases for the KLA.

Police sources in Germany have made plain their suspicions: the sudden ascendancy of Kosovan Albanians in the heroin trade in Switzerland, Germany and Scandinavia coincides with the sudden growth of the Kosovo Liberation Army from a ragamuffin peasants' army two years ago to a 30,000-strong force equipped with grenade launchers, anti-tank weapons and AK47s.

Simon Jenkins, page 20

Versatile Harriers ready to go in after cruise missile strike

Richard Owen
reports on the
high state of
readiness at
Gioia del Colle

The Harrier crews, drawn from No. 1 (Fighter) Squadron at Wittering, are backed up by a Canberra from RAF Marham providing high-definition reconnaissance photographs.

Gioia del Colle is set in a bleak area of farmland almost directly opposite Kosovo, across the Adriatic. An RAF support staff of 250 provides the aircrews with communications and maintenance as well as with home comforts such as sponge pudding and custard. There are few facilities, though a gym is promised.

With the help of British Army engineers, the RAF detachment has built a mini-city of Portakabin sheds and hangars at Gioia del Colle, and white, plastic-covered "sun shelters" for the Harriers.

"When we were here before, with a fleet of Jaguars during the Bosnia crisis, we had hardened shelters," Wg Cdr Wright, 40, said. When "we came back last year because of Kosovo, our Italian hosts had taken over facilities we had used before. But they have given us space on the edge of the base, and have even asked us how to build the white sun shelters."

Yesterday Massimo D'Alema, the Italian Prime Minister, defied criticism from Communist members of his Centre-Left coalition and said Nato bases on Italian soil were "fully available" for Nato strikes. "Nato bases are not foreign, they are part of an alliance in which Italy is a partner," he said, adding: "Just a few kilometres from our borders, the Serbs are shooting at houses inhabited by civilians. This is totally unacceptable."

THE RAF

isation of Security and Co-operation in Europe withdrawn from Kosovo, and the talks between Mr Holbrooke and President Milosevic apparently at an end, the pilots know that "this time it might be for real."

The Harriers operate alongside Italian Tornados and F3 jets at the base, and have spent the past six months patrolling over Bosnia in support of troops enforcing the peace deal there. "The terrain is much the same as Kosovo, and so are the operational problems, such as mid-air refuelling," Wing Commander Wright said. "This puts us in a high state of readiness in preparation for any operations in Kosovo. We are ready to go."

With a throaty roar which shook the ground for miles around, RAF Harriers streaked into rain-swept skies above southern Italy yesterday as Britain's contingent of eight warplanes moved into a state of high alert for action against targets in Serbia and Kosovo.

Wing Commander Graham Wright, who commands the RAF detachment on the Italian Nato base at Gioia del Colle, near Bari, said the Nato commanders were "aware of the threat from the Serbian air defences", which experts describe as sophisticated.

As Nato moves to the final countdown, the fear is that Serb air defences could bring down a Harrier, which has a crew of one and is subsonic, unlike some other ground-attack jets. But Wing Commander Wright insisted that the Harrier was a flexible, manoeuvrable aircraft and had "many strengths", including its night-time capability and laser-guided bombs which could "hit targets with precision".

He said the Harriers were "part of a coalition" of 400 allied aircraft "with different capabilities... We are part of a package in which different elements will protect each other." The mix of aircraft would "allow us to mount the most effective and coherent air campaign we can", while precision guided systems "will enable us to hit the targets we want to hit and avoid collateral damage".

Reports say the Harriers, which carry Sidewinder missiles for self-defence, would go into action after an initial wave of US-launched Tomahawk missiles aimed at Serb

RUSSIA

Primakov postpones talks in US

FROM BEN MACINTYRE
IN WASHINGTON

RUSSIA'S Prime Minister, Yevgeni Primakov, abruptly cancelled his US visit in mid-air because of the threatened airstrikes against Serb targets, the US Vice-President, Al Gore, announced yesterday.

Mr Gore added that he had discussed America's failure to win a Kosovo peace deal with Mr Primakov, who was flying to Washington. The Russian — who had earlier protested at possible Nato airstrikes — decided to return to Moscow. "We agreed that we would postpone this week's meeting," Mr Gore said.

In an explicit warning that Russia will not stand idle in the event of military action, Igor Ivanov, the Foreign Minister, had said earlier that Moscow might retaliate by pressing for an end to the UN embargo against Yugoslavia.

During his Irish stopover on his way to Washington, Mr Primakov had accused the West of double standards.



Primakov: turned back for Moscow in mid-air

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Hit-and-run attacks slow Serb advance

IN THE Drenica valleys there was no talk of peace, only the language of the gun. But the Serb offensive, in its fourth day, appeared to be faltering as the Kosovo Liberation Army fights on.

Separatist guerrillas in Poljane continued to tie down Serb forces, denying them freedom of movement along the Serbia to Kosovo road, and wily troops and armour that could otherwise press south. The sprawling village, a couple of miles east of Srbica, appeared little more than a smouldering scar on the slopes. But the KLA, facing tanks and heavy artillery with Kalashnikovs, rockets and mines, was holding out after nearly 100 hours of assault.

"There is a big difference between this offensive and the previous one last year," said Gani Koci, a senior officer in the KLA's Drenica operational zone. "Then the Serbs managed to take control over the whole of Drenica in three days while now, in similar time, they have only advanced into several villages of the region."

On the ridge here, overlooking the battlefield, KLA Tiger troops — special forces in

Anthony Loyd in Rezala sees the KLA change of tactics pay off

black uniforms — were singing as they drove into action: hardly the attitude of defeated fighters.

"There is no doubt that the Serbs can advance into KLA-controlled areas," Mr Koci said. "But they cannot stay there for a long time as they will be attacked, just as they are being attacked now, from all sides. We are changing our tactics. Operating in smaller groups we shall hit every place that the enemy forces pass through."

He spoke during a brief lull in the fighting. The peace was broken abruptly just after ten o'clock as the Serbs resumed the offensive. Katyusha multi-barrel rocket launchers hit the Rezala ridge while tanks and mortars fired into Poljane.

In Srbica itself, purged of Albanians on Saturday in an ac-

tion bore all the hallmarks of Bosnian-style "ethnic cleansing": the Yugoslav Army and police remained tense. Although they have burnt the Albanians out of villages along both the northern and southern approach roads, an army resupply convoy was ambushed on its way there from Mitrovica the previous day by a group of KLA who emerged suddenly from what the Serbs presumed was a secure area.

Allegations are mounting of a massacre of a group of Albanian men in the town, shot down as they were driven from their homes. No bodies have been seen but a number of families have reported that their missing menfolk were last seen in the hands of Serbian special forces.

On Monday night the father of one of the missing men, Milazim Rexha, knowing that his 26-year-old son had been killed on a wooded slope as he tried to escape Srbica, asked Gani Koci, a local fighter from neighbouring Lausa, if he could infiltrate the Serb lines and recover the body.

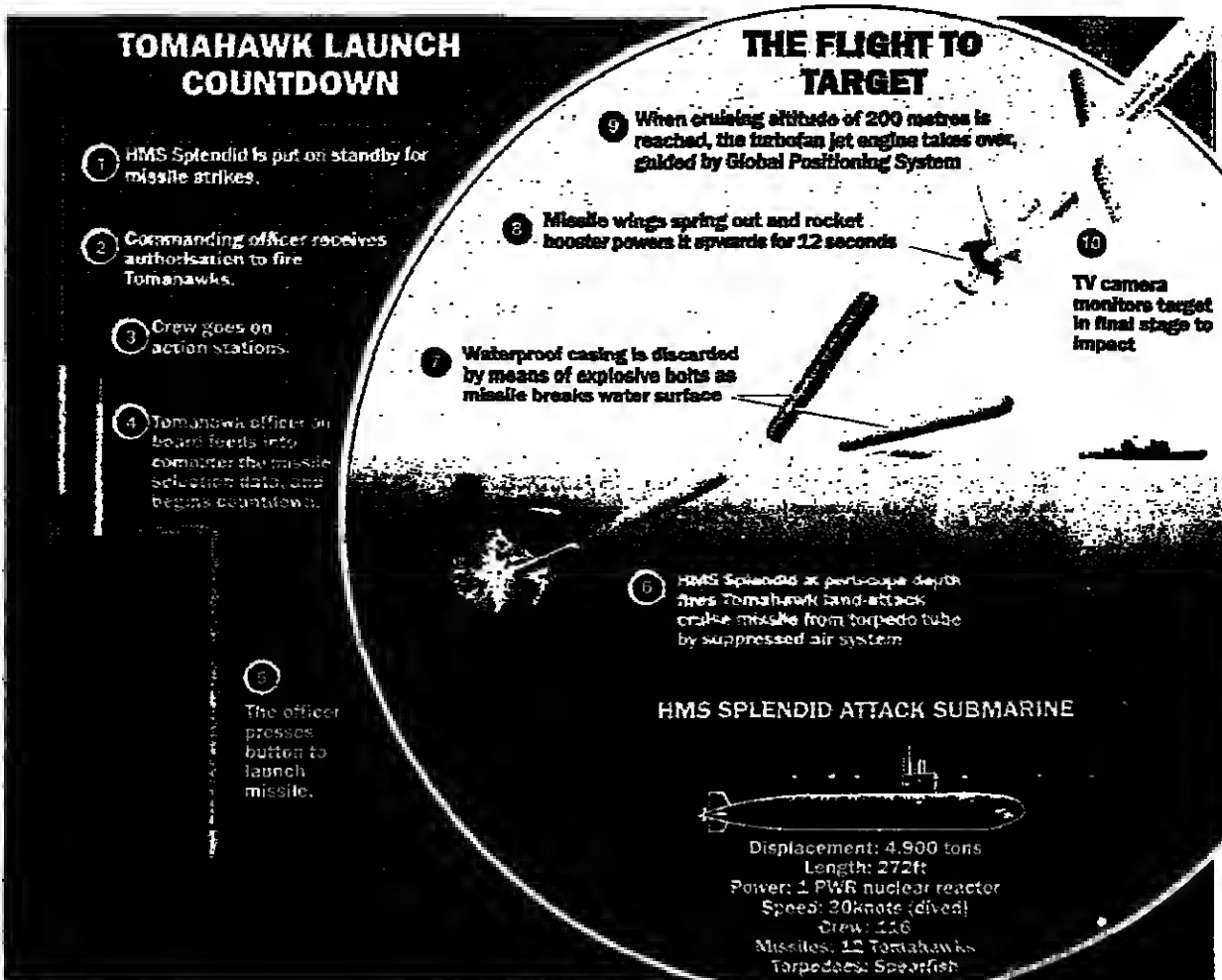
Mr Koci, who has a reputation for bravery, agreed. Crawling through the darkness accompanied by four others, he reached the body at the edge of the town and brought it back for burial.

"The police arrived in our house at about 9am on Saturday," Milazim's brother explained. "They told us to get out and go to Albania. I ran out of the house with my three brothers but another group of police about fifty metres away began shooting at us. Milazim was killed and we had to leave him. I don't know what hit him but it took his head off."

"Two days after our delegation signed for peace and I lose my brother. The Serbs understand only force. If Nato does not come soon we must always live our lives in danger."



A woman stocks up with bread in Pristina as political moves to avert Nato airstrikes faltered yesterday



Sub will strike via computer

By MICHAEL EVANS
DEFENCE EDITOR

HMS Splendid, the Royal Navy submarine on standby to fire her Tomahawk cruise missiles for the first time in anger, will operate according to a strict Nato plan which lays down precisely the launching order, timing and target selection for each weapon system.

The nuclear-powered submarine was originally designed for underwater warfare, but since she was equipped with up to a dozen Tomahawk cruise missiles and became operational with her new weapons at the end of last year, she has been available to contribute to air battles.

So, in contrast to its traditional operating philosophy — "run silent, run deep" — the submarine will operate close to the surface. It will fire its missiles from periscope depth, so that the boat can communi-



HMS Splendid, now on duty in the Adriatic

cate at short notice with friendly surface ships and submarines deployed to the Adriatic for airstrikes on Yugoslavia.

This will help to avoid missiles knocking each other out en route to a target. "Deconfliction" is a crucial aspect of all air campaigns. After the commander officer, the key man on board the *Splendid* is the "Tomahawk officer, a lieutenant who is supported by a chief petty officer."

Once the "requirement to fire" has been authorised and the commanding officer has been told which mission to select, the rest is left to the Toma-

hawk officer. Having been given the order to fire, he will set in motion the procedures that lead to pressing the button and the launch of the missile.

With the crew on action stations, the mission computer is ordered to select a particular missile, with its individually pre-programmed target fed into its guidance system, and the countdown begins. Once launched, there is no system of aborting the missile.

Before *HMS Splendid* was diverted from an exercise in the Mediterranean to the Adriatic, she already had on board "target libraries" — a computerised package of missions

consisting of pre-loaded information on military targets and missile flight routes in countries judged to be trouble spots.

Britain has a cruise missile support cell at Northwood, northwest of London. If a Royal Navy Tomahawk-armed submarine requires a new mission for its computer, the information is sent by radio data link from Northwood.

Although the Royal Navy carries out its own mission planning, target selection is a matter for the highest military authorities, once political approval has been given. Precise co-ordinates for the targets are worked out with the help of the American Global Positioning System, an integrated network of 24 satellites that guarantees accuracy to a few yards.

One defence source said: "The Tomahawk is a pilot-free way of dropping a 1,000lb bomb on a target extremely accurately."

US plan involves three key stages

FROM BEN MACINTYRE
IN WASHINGTON

NATO commanders have drawn up a three-stage plan aimed at destroying Serbia's capacity to wage war in Kosovo that could go into operation "within hours" if President Milosevic of Yugoslavia maintains his defiance.

The first phase would involve an intense bombardment of the extensive Serb missile and artillery network, using satellite-guided Tomahawk cruise missiles bearing 1,000lb warheads launched from four US Navy warships, two US submarines and the British submarine *HMS Splendid*. The B52 bombers based in Britain, armed with a 2,000lb version of the cruise

NATO

missile, are also available for the first onslaught. Nato jets might be employed to slow the advance of Serb units operating inside Kosovo.

The plan then calls for a "breathing space", providing Mr Milosevic with an opportunity to halt the Yugoslav Army offensive and accept the accord giving limited autonomy to Kosovo. If he declines to budge, the second stage of the attack would then be launched: a larger, sustained assault on 300 targets making up the Serb military infrastructure in and around Kosovo.

The third stage of the plan follows the assumed success of the first two: with Mr Milosevic ready to accept the settlement and his military machine no longer capable of retaliation or oppression, it calls for the introduction of 28,000 Nato peacekeeping troops.

LINKS

<http://www.southcoastinfo.com/> — Serbian Ministry of Information
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/> — Institute for War and Peace Reporting
<http://www.iraq.org.uk/reportable/kosovo/> — Human Rights Watch in Kosovo
<http://www.osce.org/a/overview.htm> — OSCE website for latest on the Kosovo crisis
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DON'T DREAM IT. DRIVE IT.

MPs divide into opposing camps

James Landale hears arguments for and against military action after Blair's Commons statement

MPs from all parties yesterday gave a mixed reception to Tony Blair's Commons statement on the threat of Nato airstrikes in Kosovo.

William Hague, the Tory leader, backed the need for military action from the air but opposed deployment of troops on the ground. He also said the Government should have acted earlier. "Given the repeated threats and ultimatums issued over many months, we support the Government taking the action described," he said. "And while we support the use of ground troops to implement a diplomatic settlement, we will not support the use of ground troops to fight for a settlement."

Mr Hague told Mr Blair: "While we would welcome an explicit demonstration of Nato credibility... we regret that some decisive action did not take place earlier."

Menzies Campbell, the Liberal Democrats' foreign affairs spokesman, said: "This is a bad business which could turn out to be a bloody one as well. Nobody should underestimate the risk of casualties on both sides."

But airstrikes should be contemplated "because of the deliberate and brutal targeting of civilians by the Serbian forces as they shell, loot and burn

losevic. "But he is also right to point out the very high risks involved. Most members of this House accept the need for airstrikes but with extreme reluctance because we cannot surely have confidence that bombs will bring peace. This is indeed very risky."

Sir Archibald Hamilton, chairman of the Tory backbench 1922 Committee, demanded to know what the

Prime Minister planned to do if airstrikes failed.

Bruce George, Labour chairman of the Defence Select Committee, said there was "overwhelming support" for military action among MPs and the public.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Cons. Louth and Horncastle) said airstrikes alone would not achieve Nato's objectives. Airstrikes had failed in Bosnia where a peace was achieved only when ground troops were



Tony Blair making the case for military action in his Commons statement yesterday

deployed. "Using weasel words to the British people at this point is very wrong," he said. "What the Government is proposing now is to make war on Serbia and it is a pro-

found political mistake to suppose that Milosevic is not supported by the mass of the Serbian patriotic people, who are one of the great fighting peoples of Europe. The British peo-

ple should be told now that we are embarking inevitably in ground operations that will result in heavy casualties." Mr Blair angrily insisted that Britain had no alternative but to

act. "The consequences of not acting are to plunge that whole region into chaos and consign literally thousands of innocent people to death and brutality."

Clive Soley, chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, backed airstrikes. "The British people have learnt more than anyone else that appeasement does not work."

Tom King (C. Bridgwater), the former Tory Defence Secretary, backed military action. "There is in my mind no alternative but to demonstrate very firmly the credibility of Nato," he said. But he added that ground troops would be necessary and gave warning that this would stretch Britain's Armed Forces too far.

Tony Benn (Lab. Chesterfield), the veteran former minister, said the Prime Minister's statement was the gravest since the 1966 Suez crisis. "An ultimatum has been announced amounting to an all-out air war and possibly ground war against a member state in the United Nations which under article 51 has the right to self-defence."

He insisted that Britain and its allies were breaking international law. The bombing, he claimed, was unlikely to be any more successful than it had been in Iraq. "It is bound to cause casualties, worsen the humanitarian crisis and could well widen the Balkan crisis."

Alex Salmond, the Scottish nationalist leader, asked Mr Blair to make clear whether or not the Government planned to use ground troops.

The Prime Minister replied: "We support the use of ground troops in supporting the agreement. But we do not plan to use ground troops in order to fight our way into Kosovo. It would take a huge commitment, possibly over 100,000 ground troops."

David Winnick (Lab. Walsall N) backed airstrikes. "Either we allow the atrocities to continue and the crimes against humanity to continue or we decide to act and act decisively." He said opponents of intervention had been wrong over the Falklands in 1981, over Kuwait in 1991, and in Bosnia in 1995. "So why on earth should we believe they are right now?" he asked.

David Curry (C. Skipton and Ripon) asked: "What happens if the bombing does not bring him [Milosevic] to the negotiating table?"

Julian Brazier (C. Canterbury), said evidence from Hanoi to Gromy was that bombing strengthened rather than weakened the resolve of the victim. He told Mr Blair: "If you are not willing to follow up bombing with ground forces, I put it to you, it would be better not to bomb at all."

Simon Jenkins, page 20

What happens if bombing does not work?

The question of what happens if the bombs fail, never fully answered, echoed through the hour of Commons exchanges yesterday on Kosovo. It summed up the complicated cross-currents of views and divisions at Westminster, a mixture of outrage against Serbian actions, apprehension about the risks of bombing and uncertainty about the outcome.

Tony Blair was direct, candid and occasionally passionately making the case for military action. He was right to do so now, ahead of air attacks, not least because he

will be in Berlin at the European summit for the next two days. He argued that "if Kosovo was left to the mercy of Serbian repression, there is not merely a risk but a probability of reigniting unrest in Albania; Macedonia destabilised; almost certain knock-on effects in Bosnia; and further tension between Greece and Turkey".

This won the support of most MPs, though generally with conditions and misgivings. William Hague backed airstrikes and the use of ground troops in support of a diplomatic settlement, but rejected their use to fight for such a settlement. He sought assurances that airstrikes would not be a prelude to a ground war.

Mr Blair was firm that ground forces would be used only when a settlement was in place, and not "to fight our way into Kosovo". Nato action would be solely in the form of airstrikes. He noted that more than 100,000 ground troops would be needed to defeat the Serbs in Kosovo. What he omitted was that the Americans will not agree to commit ground troops to fight in this way. Congress has been deeply divided even on sending troops to a Nato peacekeeping operation.

Opinion in the Commons was divided across party

lines. On the Labour side, there was support, albeit with warnings about the risks to British forces, from Donald Anderson and Bruce George, chairmen of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Select Committees, and opposition from the Left, notably Tony Benn and Alice Mahon.

Mr Hague's support was endorsed by establishment figures such as Tom King, Defence Secretary in the Gulf War. There was, however, substantial Tory dissent, expressed by

figures such as Sir Peter Tapsell and Julian Brazier, who questioned what bombing alone would achieve and argued that ground operations would inevitably be involved.

The central issue, put succinctly by David Curry, is what happens if bombing does not bring Milosevic to the negotiating table? Mr Blair did not claim this would necessarily be achieved and replied that airstrikes would have as their "precise minimum objective to prevent, curb and reduce his ability to suppress Kosovan Albanians" by aiming at the Serbs' military capabilities. This failed to convince all.

Similar doubts were heard yesterday in Washington. Senator John McCain, a Republican supporter of airstrikes, said that there is "no plan B if the bombing doesn't work and I'm worried whether the bombing will be sufficient".

Mr Blair obtained the necessary support for launching airstrikes, if only because of the likely further loss of life in Kosovo, and instability "on the doorstep of the European Union", if Nato does not act firmly now. But the backing is conditional and divisions are greater than during the Falklands or Gulf wars because doubting MPs, as well as Labour MPs, Mr Blair should not take parliamentary opinion for granted.



Peter RIDDELL ON POLITICS

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Barbara Cole and Mick Gambrell, who will get married while competing in the London Marathon next month

There goes the bride — for another 24 miles

By ALEX O'CONNELL

A COUPLE will tie the laces of their air-cushioned trainers before they tie the knot when they get married while running in the Flora London Marathon next month.

Mick Gambrell and Barbara Cole, from Croydon, South London, who have competed in 100 marathons between them, will say their vows at the two-mile marker, then finish the rest of the 26.2-mile race as man and wife. To mark the occasion the couple, who are experienced club runners, will be chauffeured from their hotel to the starting line, where they will lead off the field of 30,000 runners.

"We spend most of our lives running marathons and thought it would be just perfect to get married during one. We are absolutely thrilled to bits," Ms Cole said.

Mr Gambrell said: "We've run in just about every race there is and we've never heard of anything like this before, so we're really excited."

After a ten-minute sprint they will arrive at Charlton House, a Jacobean mansion alongside the course in Green-



Mick Gambrell's tattoo, instead of a ring

wich, where their guests will be waiting. They will jog into the building together to be greeted by a recording of the Tina Turner song *Simply the Best*, which has become an anthem for athletes.

"Hopefully we'll get time to grab a glass of bubbly along the way," Mr Gambrell said.

Ms Cole, 43, a teacher at a special school in Thornton Heath, Surrey, will be given a gold ring that Mr Gambrell will zip into his nylon running bracelet for safe-keeping during the first two miles. Mr Gambrell, 46, a printer at Themet Press, is unable to

wear jewellery at work, so he has a tattoo on his bicep featuring the wedding date.

A team of stylists under the direction of the designer Jeff Banks plan to restyle the couple who are usually found in shorts, fleeces and Lycra. The custom-made wedding day outfits, the designs of which remain a secret, will be "glamorous but easy to move in". Ms Cole will wear white.

The running partners first met six years ago in Lanzarote while training for endurance races. But they were both involved in relationships at the time. "We got on immediately and met up at various races afterwards and then it eventually happened," said Mr Gambrell, who has a son and a daughter by his previous marriage.

They moved in together three years ago and got engaged while running the Disney Marathon on New Year's Eve 1997.

They are expected to complete the race on April 18 in just over five hours, hours longer than their usual running times. "For once we don't care how long it takes us to get round, as long as we get there," Mr Gambrell said.

INSIDE SECTION 2



What is Chris Evans doing for Books for Schools?

Who has been stealing tokens from copies of *The Times* belonging to the House of Commons?

How can your school improve its collection of tokens and claim even more Free Books for Schools?

The answers to all these questions, and more, are revealed on page 37 today

Irvine in 'dock over jobs for the boys

By CHRISTINE MIDDAR

THE Lord Chancellor chooses to be surrounded by white men, a hearing into race and sex discrimination allegations against him was told yesterday. Lord Irvine of Lairg appointed white men to work for him and his circle of contacts was "overwhelmingly male".

The employment tribunal sitting in Croydon, South London, was hearing claims by two women that Lord Irvine and the Lord Chancellor's Department had discriminated against them by failing to advertise the job of special adviser to the Lord Chancellor or to consider them for it. Karen Monaghan, counsel for one of the women, Martha Osamor, said: "Our research suggests the Lord Chancellor has only known one black person for a long time."

The Lord Chancellor appointed Garry Hart, a senior partner in the London law firm Herbert Smith, who is also the godfather of Tony Blair's daughter, to the £73,000 position a year ago. Under the rules of appointment for special advisers, Lord Irvine was not required to advertise the position. The tribunal heard that Lord Irvine had wanted to appoint someone with whom he had long experience and in whom he had complete trust and confidence.

Ms Osamor, 39, a legal adviser, and Jane Coker, 44, an immigration lawyer, say that those specifications limited the number of black people and women who could be considered for the position, because the Lord Chancellor's circle of contacts consisted overwhelmingly of white men.

"The Lord Chancellor's world was overwhelmingly a male world and that was the world from which he chose Mr Hart," said Jane Deighton, the solicitor for both women, who is acting as counsel for Ms Coker.

Ms Coker said that she had researched the Lord Chancellor's history of social and professional contacts and believed

that the number of women with whom he had had professional contact was small.

She said that he had gone to a men's college at Cambridge, was a member of the all-male Garrick club and that, when he established his chambers in 1981, he had hired white men and one white woman. She said that he had had no black tenants until 1994 and few women tenants.

Richard McManus, counsel for the Lord Chancellor and his department, said that Lord Irvine had appointed his personal secretary, a woman, and that he had appointed women and people from ethnic minorities as clerks.

Mr McManus also said that the pool of senior lawyers available for Lord Irvine to choose from included more white men than women or members of ethnic minorities. He said to Ms Coker: "The picture you paint of the Lord Chancellor's world is a slanted picture."

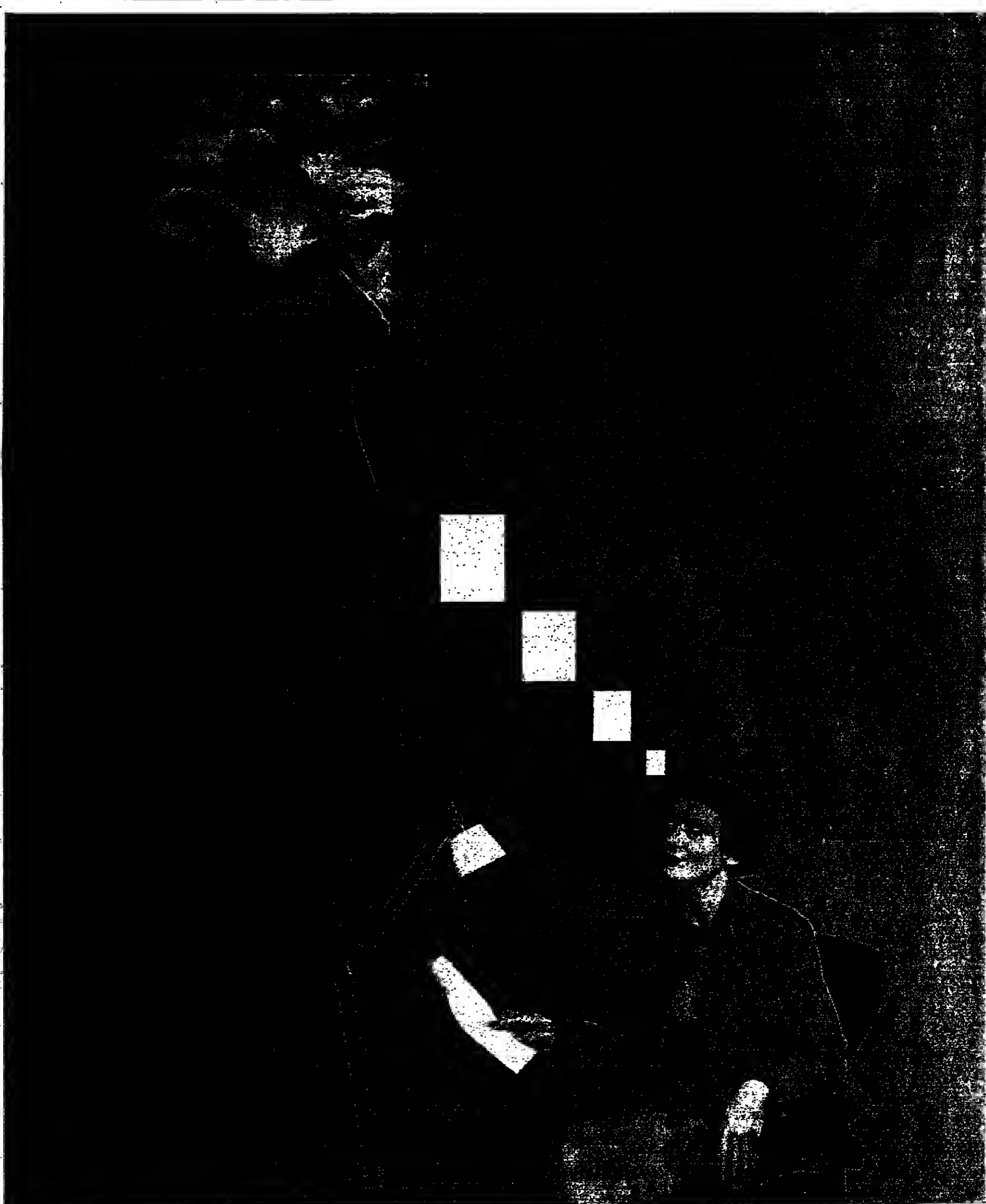
She replied: "No." Mr McManus put to Ms Osamor that Lord Irvine was simply following normal procedure in the appointment of Mr Hart. "I don't know what the normal procedure is; all I know is that it is not right," Ms Osamor replied.

Mr McManus asked Ms Coker how the Lord Chancellor could have appointed her when he had total trust. Ms Coker, who has never met Lord Irvine, said: "It is not necessary to know somebody to select them for a post in which they will need to build up a close, trusting working relationship. He failed to permit me to show that I met the criteria."

Ms Monaghan said the pair had been treated differently from Mr Hart because of their gender and, in Ms Osamor's case, because she was black. She urged the tribunal to draw an adverse inference from the Lord Chancellor's decision not to give evidence. "He's not above the law," she said.

The hearing continues.

'He has known only one black person for some time'



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Osamor and Coker accuse the Lord Chancellor of bias

Thousands caught in travel paper chaos

Businessmen and tourists stranded by immigration office's computer problems, reports Richard Ford

A COMPUTER project costing £77 million to speed immigration and asylum decisions is at least 14 months behind schedule, causing chaos for thousands of people unable to update travel documents.

Plans to make 500 staff redundant at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate have been abandoned after warnings that job losses could cause more delays for the public, according to a government watchdog report today. More problems could be in store because the limited software being used by the directorate is not year-2000 compliant.

The National Audit Office report says that, in retrospect, the project was too ambitious.

Thousands of people, including foreign businessmen and travellers, have been stranded in Britain because their passports cannot be located at the

director's offices in Croydon, South London. Jack Straw yesterday made his second visit in five weeks to Croydon as the Home Office admitted that applicants "trapped" in Britain and unable to travel could receive ex-gratia payments from the Government.

Mr Straw said: "I regard turning the situation round at Croydon as the most important management task in the Home Office."

People requiring work permits have suffered months of delays because of chaos at Croydon caused by the new working practices and the delays in computer upgrading under a contract agreed by the Conservative Government.

Sir John Bourn, head of the National Audit Office, says in his report that it is a matter of concern that the directorate has not secured delivery of the



Sir John Bourn said the project was too ambitious

project on time. "The directorate, applicants and the taxpayer have not yet received the full benefits the project was intended to produce."

The report adds: "There are many examples of bespoke projects such as this one, which in retrospect can be seen to have been too ambitious, despite there having been enthusiastic bids for the work from prospective suppliers."

The aim of the contract awarded to Siemens Business

Services was to switch from paper to a computer-based system. Computers were to be upgraded and officials trained in new working methods.

But problems arose when it was decided to abandon plans to use existing information technology packages and create tailor-made software. Under the previous Government it was decided to press ahead without renegotiating a new timetable for implementing the project. That meant that the partial introduction of the system in April 1998 was put back to later this summer.

The problems have been compounded by the relocation of 1,000 staff from the directorate's headquarters at Lunar House to another office in the nearby Whitgift Centre in Croydon. The staff plus 200,000 paper files, stretching for 14 miles, began moving in December and in the chaos travel documents have been mislaid.

The directorate is telling people in urgent need of travel documents to approach embassies and high commissions to request new ones.



Zoe Machson, 23, waiting to audition yesterday. The producers say Hardy's bleak novel is "strangely life-affirming"

Hunt for Tess with a song in her heart

By HELEN RUMBELOW

THE search for an actress to play Thomas Hardy's doomed heroine in a romantic musical based on his bleak novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* began yesterday at open auditions in London. Outside the theatre stood a queue of 200 hopeful women, including one in traditional Wessex dress and sporting a harp.

Each was hoping for a part in the all-singing, all-dancing adaptation of the novel, with lyrics by Justin Fleming and music by Stephen Edwards, that comes to the West End this autumn, sponsored by Nestlé Matchmakers.

Bruce Athol MacKinnon, who designed the production by the JFK Repertory Company, said there would be no high-kicking milkmaids, or blockbuster finales. In an effort to avoid the media lampooning meted out to *Heathcliff*, a musical adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* starring Sir Cliff Richard as the brooding anti-hero, they have stayed as close as possible to the spirit of Hardy. The concept is of a "modern opera", rather than a *Tess*-style pop show. "It is an epic love story that is

strangely life-affirming, rather than depressing, like *Miss Saigon*, or *Madam Butterfly*. Sad but beautiful."

It opens with Tess meeting her beloved Angel Clare in the rustic comedy of a Dorset dairy; her dark past with the dastardly Alec D'Urberville is told in a "danced flashback".

Mr MacKinnon said: "Hardy was a huge fan of people developing his work — there was an opera version of *Tess* performed at the turn of the century, although they only did the first half of the book. He himself wrote a play of *Tess*." Among contemporary adaptations are Roman Polanski's film, starring Nastassja Kinski, and a recent dramatisation for television.

The musical's director, Karen Hebdon, said: "We're not looking for a Kinski, but a girl with real spark to her, that fits a woman's version of *Tess* rather than a man's. I'm not convinced we've moved on so far since the last century in terms of sexual politics. Monica Lewinsky was asked how she could have fallen for such a creep; that was pure *Tess* of a century ago."

NEWS IN BRIEF

54 held in police raids

Five hundred police made a series of raids against drug dealers, burglars and receivers linked to the Salford area. Officers from Greater Manchester Police arrested 43 men and 11 women, and recovered a sawn-off shotgun and two pistols. The raids followed a year-long undercover operation that found stolen property and drugs worth about £500,000.

Braille monthly

A monthly braille magazine for young men with sight problems will be launched next month by the Royal National Institute for the Blind. SP will feature relationships, health, sex and entertainment.

Badger abuse

Richard Atkins, 31, and Lee Burton, 25, both of Swadlincote, Derbyshire, have been jailed for two months for digging for badgers to fight their dogs. They were banned from keeping dogs for three years.

Driver plastered

A motorist who drove with his entire right leg encased in plaster was fined £300 for careless driving. Kenneth Irvine, 24, had his licence endorsed with four penalty points by Paisley Sheriff Court.

Think pink

Newly planted saplings in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, are to have luminous pink bands painted on their trunks to deter thieves who stole an £80 Douglas fir from Linear Park in Cinderford.

Stalker is found dead in her car

A WOMAN bank worker who was convicted of stalking a businessman has been found dead.

The body of Angela Reid, an assistant manager with the TSB, was found in a fume-filled car in a forest near Newport, South Wales. Police said that her death was not being treated as suspicious.

Miss Reid, 40, had been embarrassed after appearing in court for stalking a client, Simon Butler, whom she had harassed for six months after a one-night stand. She was given a conditional discharge by magistrates in Pontypridd seven months ago. They decided not to jail her because a prison sentence would ruin her career.

Miss Reid was a rising executive with the TSB until her fling with Mr Butler, a restaurateur. Magistrates were told that afterwards she had circulated a photograph of him, with the words "no-good bastard" written on it, to his restaurant, and that she had sent letters to his ex-wife and parents saying he took drugs and drank too much.

The court was told that she had met Mr Butler, 33, six years earlier when he opened a mortgage account at the TSB, and that "there had been continuous business dealing between them". However, she began ringing him continually, even after he had changed to a silent number. The calls, the court was told, then became more threatening.

Miss Reid was on long-term sick leave from the TSB, which declined to comment. A friend of Miss Reid said: "The court case was a terrible strain on her and her career. Everyone knew about it."

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Cancer mix-up cost woman her breast

Hospital may face £500,000 compensation claim, reports Ian Murray

A HOSPITAL trust has admitted responsibility for a laboratory test mistake that led to a young mother having a healthy breast removed after cancer was wrongly diagnosed.

Last month Anita Froggatt, 28, from Chesterfield, Derbyshire, had her right breast and six lymph nodes removed because a laboratory report said that a biopsy taken from her was cancerous.

Her ordeal began at Christmas when she noticed a lump the size of a marble on her right breast. She was relieved when two biopsies proved negative and a scan was also clear but as a precaution she opted to have the lump removed. It was cut away and taken to the pathology laboratory for routine tests. However, these showed she did have cancer so she agreed to have her breast removed.

As she was about to start a course of chemotherapy, further tests on tissue taken from

her revealed it to be perfectly healthy.

When the mistake was discovered a laboratory worker was put on paid leave until an investigation is completed but the surgeon who carried out the operation has not been suspended.

"There can be no blame attached there at all," said Christopher Day, the medical director of Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital

NHS Trust. "It is a tragic situation and we take full responsibility," he said. "We have given her a frank explanation of events and of course, a full apology. We have discussed the options available now and the help we can offer — including counselling."

A hospital spokeswoman said no other patient was involved. "It might have been a wrong diagnosis or it could have been that a slide from

someone with cancer was read twice and the second reading was wrongly thought to be from Mrs Froggatt's slide." Checks had been increased.

The trust could face a compensation claim of up to £500,000. The spokeswoman said: "We appreciate that the patient is entitled to compensation, but we have not been contacted by a lawyer yet. We want to support this lady as much as possible and a compensation case dragging out would not be ideal."

Mrs Froggatt has lost her factory job because the removal of her lymph glands restricts the use of her arm. She said yesterday: "I couldn't believe what they had done to me for nothing. They have ruined my life."

Frank Dobson, the Health Secretary, said: "It makes me feel I'll just thinking about it. I will be writing to this poor lady and have asked for immediate action to ensure this never happens again."



Paul and Anita Froggatt: "They ruined my life," she said



David Penn, who won first prize in a competition to invent a millennium gadget, demonstrates his room locator

Boy shows the way to lost souls

A COMPETITION to invent a gadget for the millennium has been won by a ten-year-old boy whom the organisers mistook for an adult (Elizabeth Judge writes). David Penn, from Stowmarket, Suffolk, came up with a homing device to help lost hotel guests to find their rooms in the maze of identical corridors and doors.

tion, run by the Post House Hotel Group, wrote to inform "Mr Penn" that he had won. A spokesman said: "We were expecting him to be in his thirties. We were totally surprised to find out he was so young. His gadget shows sheer genius."

The handheld device, named a "room locator", looks like a calculator. When a

hotel key is inserted, flashing arrows on the screen will work with sensors in the hotel to lead users to their rooms. David has applied for a patent on his design.

The first prize was supposed to be two nights in an hotel on New Year's Eve. David opted instead for a party with his friends and his favourite meal of hamburgers and chips.

Woman of 55 has second test-tube baby

BY ADRIAN LEE

A WOMAN who became Britain's oldest mother of a test-tube baby two years ago has given birth again, two months short of her 56th birthday.

Pauline Lyon, who caused controversy when she lied about her age to try to secure fertility treatment five years ago, had a healthy boy at Hinchbrook Hospital in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, on Monday.

Mrs Lyon said before the birth: "I know a lot of people will disagree with what we are doing, but it will be wonderful for our daughter to have a little brother or sister to play and grow up with."

Before their daughter, Lauren, was conceived, Mrs Lyon and her husband, Dave, 53, a prison officer, from March, Cambridgeshire, advertised in newspapers and local shops seeking an egg donor.

Last year Liz Buttle, 61, from Lampeter, West Wales, who also hid her age, took Mrs Lyon's record as the oldest mother to have a test-tube baby following treatment in Britain. Both women were treated at the London Gynaecology and Fertility Centre in Harley Street. Mrs Lyon had



Pauline Lyon with her daughter Lauren

lied to another clinic in an unsuccessful attempt to gain treatment.

Ian Craft, director of the centre, said yesterday: "Mrs Lyon had every reason to have another child. She is a wonderful, competent mother and to have a boy to go with the little girl is great." He said there had been natural conceptions at the age of 55 — the upper limit that the clinic sets for fertility treatment. Professor Craft said: "I am much more concerned by very young conceptions."

An Italian woman gave birth to a test-tube baby at the age of 62.

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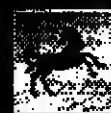
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Watchdog attacks Street deal

Soap opera storyline has incurred the wrath of the Office of Fair Trading, reports Carol Midgley

A PRICE-FIXING deal between two shops that has featured in the plot of *Coronation Street* has been condemned by the Office of Fair Trading.

Officials said the soap's newsagent, Rita Sullivan, and its corner-shop owner, Ravi Desai, had made an illegal agreement that set a bad example to the public.

Mrs Sullivan has pledged not to sell cheap bread and, in return, Mr Desai has promised to stop stocking cut-price newspapers.

In its first warning on a television plot, the trading watchdog said that such deals were competitive and could be referred to the Restrictive Practices Court.

Granada Television defended the storyline as "harmless", the Office of Fair Trading said that, if unchallenged, it endorsed a breach of the law.

Mrs Sullivan's foster daughter, Sharon Gaskell, had begun the price war by selling cheap bread while she was looking after the shop.

Mr Desai's daughter, Nita, who runs the corner shop, retaliated by stocking papers. But Mrs Sullivan and Mr Desai later made a deal that they would not take away each other's trade.

An Office of Fair Trading spokesman said: "It is rare to see a case like this in real life. We would definitely have to look at it. It could be seen as a market-sharing agreement be-

cause it is restricting competition between shops, as defined under the Restrictive Practices Act.

"Most agreements where two or more parties agree to restrict their freedom to compete must be sent to the Office of Fair Trading.

"We take a strong line against price-fixing and market-sharing, but suspect that some of these agreements go on because people are unaware of the law.

"Agreements do not have to be written down to be covered by the legislation. If this law is broken we will instruct the businesses to stop the practice and, if they persist, they could end up in prison for contempt of court."

The spokesman added: "It will be interesting to see how the storyline develops and we will be watching it closely."

Granada Television seemed unaware that such a deal would be ruled illegal. A spokesman said: "It was just a gentleman's agreement between Ravi Desai and Rita Fairclough. Mr Desai agreed not to sell newspapers at the corner shop and Mrs Fairclough agreed not to sell bread at The Kabin. As far as we are concerned they were just keeping to an agreement which stretches back 20 years to the time of Alf Roberts."

She added: "We do not feel the agreement is restricting competition because Coronation Street residents can go to the Fresho Supermarket if they don't want to shop locally. It does not restrict them from buying what they want and it's not market-sharing because the shops don't sell the same things."

"I don't know whether the scriptwriters want to bring the Office of Fair Trading into the storyline, but we feel it is a harmless story."



Ravi Desai, the *Coronation Street* corner-shop owner played by Saeed Jaffrey, has struck a deal with Rita Sullivan (Barbara Knox) that suits both parties



When soaps bubble over into reality

IT IS not the first time that soap operas have made waves in the real world. Last year the Prime Minister demanded the release of Deirdre Ratchid from prison, to the derision of political commentators.

Mrs Ratchid, a character from *Coronation Street*, had been wrongfully imprisoned for fraud, to the outrage of viewers. A spokesman for Tony Blair said at the time: "The power to free her lies with the

scriptwriters and they would do well to hear public and parliamentary opinion. While they are at it, they should ensure that Sally and Kevin, the Websters, whose marriage is in trouble, live happily ever after as well."

The jailing of the fireman George Jackson in Channel 4's *Brookside* prompted a national campaign to free him. T-shirts were issued, "Free George Jackson" graf-

fiti began appearing on walls and a pop record of the same title was released.

Brookside angered cancer charities when it featured an elderly woman dying at home in agony because she did not have enough morphine to control her pain. Macmillan Cancer Relief and other charities made statements emphasising that, in reality, cancer patients would never be left to suffer such pain.

Patient's daughter defends doctor

By A CORRESPONDENT

THE daughter of a woman allegedly starved to death on a doctor's orders yesterday backed the doctor's judgment.

The woman, named only as Mrs D, said that she and her three sisters were relieved when they heard that Ken Taylor had told nurses at the Ford House nursing home in Prestbury to stop "force-feeding" 85-year-old Mary Ormerod in June 1995. She told the General Medical Council's professional conduct committee that neither she nor her sisters had

exercised any influence over Dr Taylor's decision.

Mrs D told the committee of Dr Taylor's unstinting support for the family and of his frequent visits to examine Mrs Ormerod. She said that, after a major stroke in 1994, her mother had no longer appeared to be able to take fluids, but that, after a discussion with Dr Taylor and the matron of the home at the time, it was agreed that nurses and care assistants would continue to give her the food supplement Fresubin orally through a syringe. Mrs D said that "it was awful

having to watch them forcing it into her".

Mrs D said that none of the nursing staff, with whom she had a good relationship, had ever complained to them about the doctor's instructions, and that the family did not know at the time that nurses had ignored the instruction not to feed Mrs Ormerod during the 58 days before she died.

Dr Taylor, 51, admits instructing nursing staff to stop giving Mrs Ormerod Fresubin, but denies serious professional misconduct. The hearing continues.

Happy birthday? Get a life

By IAN MURRAY
MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT

BIRTHDAY cards could be sent by the NHS to people in their forties or fifties with a quiz to increase their chances of a healthy old age.

The idea is among possibilities being considered by the National Screening Committee, which has overall responsibility for devising programmes to give early warn-

ing of health risks to individuals. The birthday cards would contain a checklist of lifestyle and health symptoms for early detection of vascular disease and diabetes. Recipients who scored badly would be advised to see their doctor.

Muir Gray, joint director of the committee, told a London conference yesterday that a wider screening programme was being introduced over the next five years. Later this year

the committee is to introduce an antenatal and childhood programme, giving all pregnant women the option of being tested for the risk of genetic disorders, and monitoring physical development throughout childhood.

Next year there will be an assessment of the value of screening for testicular, skin and oral cancers. Screenings for ovarian and prostate cancer were in the research stage.

Susanne Bergstram, environmental manager for Ikea, said yesterday that the company was aware of the difficulties facing the Sami. Ikea was trying to source certified wood, including Forest Stewardship Certified products. But she conceded that the company "could not guarantee" that shoppers were being sold furniture and wood items under the scheme.

Steve Howard, of the World Wide Fund for Nature, which is backing the Sami, said yesterday: "Ikea should use its muscle to get forest owners properly certified. Some companies have put their heads above the parapet; ones such as Ikea should too."

For centuries the Sami, who number 3,000 in Sweden, have herded reindeer from summer mountain areas into winter woodlands. But in recent years large forest companies have sold off land to smaller landlords, who claim that the reindeer damage trees.

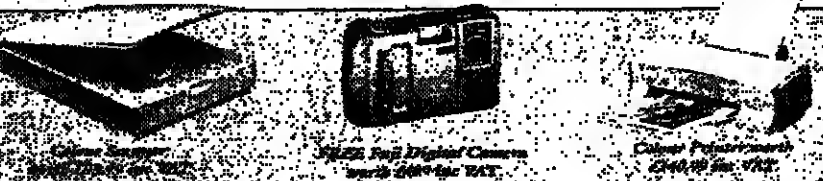
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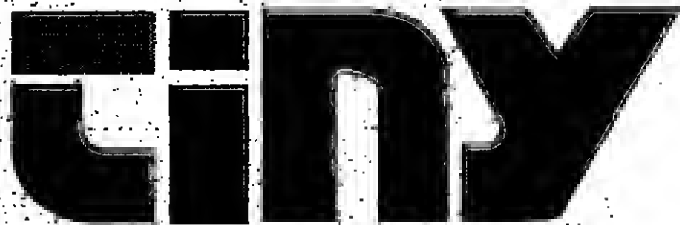
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EU leaders head for compromise to rescue battered image

THE European Union's equivalent of the Holy Grail lies just within reach of its leaders as they embark in Berlin today on a mammoth wrangle over money and naming a new chief executive. But the deal still needs painful concessions, mainly from Britain, France, Germany and Spain.

After a year of haggling, the makings of a compromise have emerged that would partially satisfy Britain over its special budget rebate, appease the French over farm spending, calm Mediterranean demands over the cash flow from Brussels and answer some of Germany's need for a drop in its lion's share of EU funding.

As part of the package, Romano Prodi, the former Italian Prime Minister, would

Deal puts pressure on Britain over rebate, write Charles Bremner and Philip Webster in Berlin

replace Jacques Santer as Commission President. A promise of the post to an Italian is central to winning Rome's agreement to paying about £750 million more per year to Brussels, an equation that prompted one EU Ambassador to dub Signor Prodi the "billion euro man".

Gerhard Schröder, the German Chancellor and the EU's president-in-office, yesterday warned his fellow leaders that their mission was "to save the European Union, in the eyes of the public at least, from a deep crisis".

Diplomats believe that the emergency created by the abrupt resignation of all the commissioners has increased the chances of an accord that only last week looked unlikely. The brewing storm over Kosovo is adding to pressure for the EU to demonstrate resolve over its own house-keeping. According to the emerging plan, the new President could take over, along with 19 new commissioners, after approval by the European Parliament in May.

However, the endgame in the wrangle needs Tony Blair and the leaders of the

other key states to budge from positions that have been fixed for months and sold to their domestic audiences as "non-negotiable". "It's a matter of who blinks first," a senior German official said.

France, which feels it has been left out on a limb by its German partner and has most to lose, yesterday warned the others that it could walk away from the negotiating table. "It would not be a drama if the reform package is not completed," said Hubert Védrine, the Foreign Minister.

A cut in Britain's rebate from the EU budget is one of a series of concessions deemed vital by the others for the Union to tie up a six-year spending package that is needed before opening the EU to states from central and eastern Europe.

Germany hopes that Mr Blair will accept a plan to continue the "British cheque" while excluding from its ambit funds earmarked for enlarging the Union. This could add £1 billion to Britain's annual bill, but would be softened by other adjustments, including £250 million a year from the Italian concession. Downing Street last night insisted that the plan would bite too deeply into the rebate, negotiated in 1984, and worth £2 billion a year.

Mr Blair would be open to a fierce assault from William Hague and the Eurosceptics if both changes were made. His only consolation would be that, if enlargement is delayed to 2006 — as seems possible given the likely failure of the summit to agree the radical Agenda

2000 package — he would have a long time to prepare public opinion for the near halving of the rebate.

In a pre-summit interview yesterday Mr Blair denied that he was being obstinate over the rebate. It was there for a purpose — to rectify what would otherwise be the "monstrously unjust" situation of Britain having the lowest receipts yet making the second largest net contributions. He appeared to accept, however, that some adjustments at the edges might eventually be forced on Britain. Mr Blair confirmed his support for Signor Prodi as the next Commission President.

Blair should not back Prodi, page 20
Leading article and Letters, page 21

Muse of poetry takes to the Métro

BY ADAM SAGE

IN THE from row, as Denise Desautel opened a little blue book and began reading her erotic poem, *The Carass*, a tramp clasped a bottle of red wine and smiled. A meaningful look crossed her face as the poem ended. The tramp belched.

Yesterday's encounter in the Paris Métro marked a high point in the latest attempt by the French Government to stimulate artistic creativity. The seventh-day national poetry festival — *Le Printemps des Poètes* — was the brainchild of Catherine Trautmann, Culture Minister.

Holding one of the highest-profile jobs in French politics, with a budget of Fr15 billion (£1.5 billion), she has been unable to escape from the shadow of her predecessor, Jack Lang.

In the 1980s, he threw money at museums and films and set up a music festival, without any impact on artistic inspiration. But that is irrelevant, as Mme Trautmann knows. Critics do not want results. They want innovative happenings, such as the Fr6 million poetry festival which, some say, will satisfy a people deprived of contemporary literature because they do not know it exists.

France in shock as top judge resigns

FROM ADAM SAGE IN PARIS

A POLITICAL earthquake hit France yesterday when the highest-ranking judge and the nation's fifth most important dignitary was forced out of office by a scandal involving sex and money.

In an unprecedented fall from grace, Roland Dumas, 76, said he would step down temporarily as head of the Constitutional Council, the equivalent of the US Supreme Court.

The move follows the testimony of his former mistress, Christine Deviers-Joncour, 51, implicating him in a sleaze inquiry involving the oil group, Elf-Aquitaine.

M Dumas, a former Foreign Minister under the late President Mitterrand, fell victim to two of the new breed of investigating judges, Eva Joly and Laurence Vichnievsky.

Their inquiry into allegations of bribery and fraud at the heart of the French state has overturned the longstanding, if unofficial, immunity of dignitaries. M Dumas's announcement yesterday was

welcomed by his Socialist allies but criticised by a number of right-wing politicians. Philippe de Villiers, the Eurosceptic MP, described M Dumas's announcement as inadequate. "He should leave permanently," he said.

After dismissing calls for his resignation, M Dumas yesterday said he would step aside until Mme Joly and Mme Vichnievsky had finished their inquiries. Although he insists that he will return to the post, most lawyers believe he will quit for good.

"I want to be free to continue my search for the truth in the Elf affair and to rediscover my strength, which has been undermined by the blows I have received over the past few months," M Dumas said.

The hardest of these blows have come from Mme Deviers-Joncour, who is herself under investigation on suspicion of having been given Fr66 million (£6.7 million) by Elf between 1990 and 1993 to lobby the Government.



Roland Dumas, fifth in the French State's pecking order and the most senior official to resign in the State's history

This month she said M Dumas had benefited from Elf's largesse when he was Foreign Minister, receiving 12 Ancient Greek statues worth a total of Fr264,000 and a flat valued at Fr17.5 million. M Dumas denies the allegations.

Until recently M Dumas was convinced that he would be able to cling to his job as the French political class, led by President Chirac, closed ranks

around him. But he failed to appreciate that the public is increasingly aware of the gap between France's *laissez-faire* culture and the transparency of its neighbours.

When Mme Deviers-Joncour wrote an autobiography entitled *The Whore of the Republic*, public opinion swung in her favour and against M Dumas and newspapers abandoned the traditional taboo on

reporting private affairs of public figures.

Yesterday Mme Joly and Mme Vichnievsky were in South Africa on the trail of Alfred Sirven, who is suspected of organising and running Elf's slush fund at the start of the 1990s. If Mr Sirven is found, M Dumas's head may not be the only one to roll. There is evidence to suggest that Elf bankrolled virtually

the entire French political system — and notably M Chirac's Gaullist movement — for many years.

LINKS
<http://www.lesfigaro.com/actualite/actualite/actualite.html> — Mitterrand 1916-1996
<http://www.constitutionnel.fr/mag.htm> — The Constitutional Council website

Sex-tape official swoops on Kremlin

FROM ANNA BLINDY IN MOSCOW

THE Prosecutor-General raided the offices of senior Kremlin officials yesterday in an investigation into illegalities in lucrative construction deals with the Swiss firm Mabatek.

The action came after a scandal of sex and lies rocked Moscow last week and as Carla del Ponte, the Swiss Attorney-General, arrived in Moscow to assist Yuri Skuratov, her Russian counterpart. Mr Skuratov, humiliated last week by the release of a secret video in which he is allegedly shown cavorting with two prostitutes, said: "It is business as usual."

Mabatek won million-dollar contracts to renovate buildings in Russia and has denied any wrongdoing. It has threatened to sue Mr Skuratov.

"The links between these raids, the Skuratov sex scandal and Mabatek are clear," Andrei Piontovsky, a political analyst, said. "A naked man jumping around in video-footage with two girls is no longer the Prosecutor-General, but while he still retains his position he is going to hurt the Kremlin as much as he can."

It is believed that President Yeltsin and his close associates want to be rid of Mr Skuratov because of any compromising material he may hold on them. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* suggested yesterday that the latest developments might signal the end for Mr Yeltsin and his beleaguered staff, who are "wrecked and demoralised".

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WORLD SUMMARY

Le Pen faces gun inquiry

Brussels: Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of France's far right National Front, is under investigation by Belgian police after unlicensed weapons and teargas grenades were found in his car here. (Charles Bremner writes).

M Le Pen was detained briefly along with his driver and bodyguard after police inspected his car on Sunday night. In Paris, his party said: "Neither the car nor the weapons belong to M Le Pen." But it referred to "our vehicle" and "protection equipment".

Cyprus bomb

Nicosia: Savvas Savva, the chief game warden of Cyprus, was killed when a bomb exploded in his car in Limassol. Police suspect that Mr Savva, 51, had angered poachers and are questioning a man.

Leader killed

Asunción, Paraguay: Gunmen assassinated the Vice-President, Luis María Argana, while he was driving to work. Tension rose in this new democracy where President Cubas is fighting impeachment calls. (AP)

Annan inquiry

New York: Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, who has been criticised for his role in Rwanda while head of UN peacekeeping, has ordered an independent inquiry into the UN's reaction to the 1994 genocide.

Kidnap ends

Bangkok: Hong Wut-myong, above, the kidnapped 19-year-old son of a North Korean envoy, was freed by the country's Thai embassy, ending a diplomatic stand-off. (Reuters)

Ships fired on

Tokyo: Patrol boats have chased and fired warning shots at two suspected North Korean ships, Japan's first naval engagement since 1953. (Reuters)

Rivals fall out of love with Shakespeare

Oscars hit by accusations of unfairness, writes Giles Whittell

THE winner of the Oscar for the year's best film, Shakespeare in Love, has been hit by unenviable griping from rivals who claim fairness was "thrown out the window" by a \$15 million (£9.2 million) promotional blitz for the film. As the dust settled in Hollywood yesterday, the question on many minds was: Can an Oscar be bought?

A day after its upset win over Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, producers were still pinching themselves and condemning Miramax, a division of the Disney studio, which paid for the saturation advertising for the Elizabethan-era romantic comedy in the run-up to the awards. One called the strategy "disgusting". Another called it "strong-arm tactics".

Starting before the Oscar nominations were announced last month, Miramax placed glossy, full-page advertisements almost daily in the *Hollywood Reporter* and *Daily Variety*, urging Academy members to back *Shakespeare in Love*. The New York-based production company spent up to five times the norm for an Oscar contender on such advertisements, experts have said. It has also been accused — not least by Jeffrey Katzenberg of DreamWorks, the studio behind *Saving Private Ryan* — of setting up telephone banks to cold-call Academy members

urging them not to back the Spielberg film.

Yesterday Miramax denied the telephone campaigning allegation as "a 100 per cent categorical lie". Its chairman, Harvey Weinstein, has also denied outspending DreamWorks on advertising in the trade press, claiming after the awards that Warren Beatty had consulted a senior executive and concluded that the *Saving Private Ryan* studio had spent most.

But Mr Weinstein is now, more than ever, the mini-mogul the rest of Hollywood loves

to hate. "The machinery Harvey puts in place is like a juggernaut," Mark Urmann of Lion's Gate Films, which produced *Gods and Monsters*, said. "All predictions, all sense of logic and, in some instances, a sense of fairness is thrown out the window."

The depth of shock in Hollywood's upper echelons over Spielberg's failure to win the most coveted Oscar was brought home by front-page pictures in yesterday's *Los Angeles Times*. One showed Mr Weinstein and his entourage exultant at the Governor's Ball immediately after the awards. The other showed Messrs Spielberg and Katzenberg a few hours later at their own thinly attended party. They looked for all the world like mourners.

Hollywood obsessed, page 20



Monica Lewinsky and her escort, Jonathan Marshall, arriving for the Vanity Fair post-Oscars party at Morton's Restaurant in Beverly Hills

Monica shows off her new man

FROM JAMES BONE IN NEW YORK

MONICA LEWINSKY is turning heads with a dashing new date. The former presidential girlfriend arrived at *Vanity Fair's* Oscar party in Hollywood on the arm of Jonathan Marshall, the in-house counsel with The Shooting Gallery, a Manhattan film company.

It was the second high-profile date for the pair, who first appeared together in public at The Shooting Gallery's Christmas party, when the company president described Mr Marshall's escort as "his lady".

Friends and co-workers are still divided about whether the two are "in a relationship".

They met last year at a New York dinner party hosted by Herb Rits, the *Vanity Fair* photographer who shot the famous pictures of an insouciant Monica sprawled on the beach. The friendship developed when they found they worked out at the same gym.

Mr Marshall, 35 and a six-footer, is a graduate of Tulane University in New Orleans.

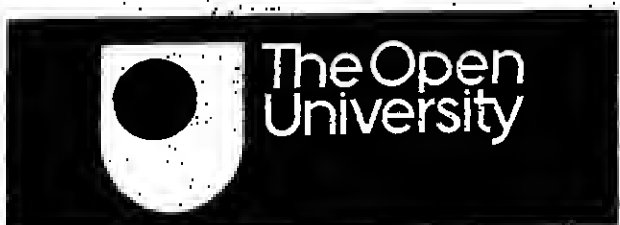
Teletubbies sue over US copies

THE Teletubbies should have known when they came to America that it was only a matter of time before they would end up in litigation (James Bone writes).

Tinky Winky, Laa-Laa, Po and Dipsy, Britain's most popular children's television characters, have now filed a suit to protect themselves from four cuddly dolls with bulging bellies called the "Bubbly Chubbies" who have turned up in Wal-Mart supermarkets.

"The Bubbly Chubbies characters are obvious, studied copies knockoffs of the famous Teletubbies characters," states the lawsuit against Wal-Mart. The owners and marketers of the merry band, Ragdoll Productions and its Bitty Entertainment, are seeking unspecified damages through the federal court in Manhattan.

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Police flown in to quell ethnic war in Borneo

FROM DAVID WATTS IN SINGKAWANG, WEST KALIMANTAN

WITH the death toll at about 200, Hercules transports of the Indonesian Air Force disgorged 1,000 police officers to try to stamp out ethnic violence between Madurese migrants and locals yesterday before it spreads further in this province in Borneo.

Thousands of Dayaks and Malays were reported last night to be surrounding an area where 4,000 Madurese remain trapped, awaiting evacuation by two companies of troops on board helicopters. In one incident yesterday, troops with automatic rifles fired volleys to disperse mobs before rescuing a dozen Madurese who were sheltering under tarpaulins.

Three human heads were later seen on the road with two bodies nearby, their hearts and livers cut out. The official Antara news agency said that the military would take charge of the area in an attempt to restore order.

Another 2,000 Madurese were awaiting evacuation at the air base in Singkawang while two teams of soldiers and police evacuated 400 people from Belitung in the Selayan sub-district.

Reports persisted among distraught families of pockets of



people stranded at the mercy of the Malays and Dayaks, who have been rampaging across the area armed with machetes, spears and old rifles, torching homes of fleeing Madurese settlers. So far the burnt houses and pathetic remnants left by a trail of refugees are confined to the lush western seaboard, but there are fears that it could spread if the Government cannot bring it under control soon.

As dusk fell last night, regional experts said they feared that the Madurese might have hidden in the rainforest a few miles inland and be waiting to take revenge. Their women and children, meanwhile, are packing the regional capital, Pontianak, after fleeing in cars, boats and army lorries.

Every available public building has been taken over and, with more arriving all the time, the total has topped 13,000. A large batch arrived

overnight in the city's port on an American-built destroyer of the Indonesian Navy that was packed to the gunwales with refugees fleeing from the north.

The road north out of Pontianak to Singkawang shows signs of those who escaped south by more conventional means. Scraps of clothing lie on the narrow tarmac road. Here and there, young men carry the long, curved-blade parangs used by farmers clearing land but which are also a devastating weapon.

More than 2,000 Madurese have taken refuge in the Pontianak sports stadium while others are in warehouses and with families. They say they are too frightened to return home and many have little to return to.

It is hard to see how the Government can create the confidence necessary for them to return without taking the risk of involving the armed forces in direct confrontation with either group. Since the army is disliked by both sides, there is the potential for a bloodbath. Nonetheless, the army was last night moving machine-guns and automatic rifles into the main hotel in Singkawang.

The unrest in Kalimantan is materially different from the recent clashes in the Moluccas, the Spice Islands and East Timor, where the land area involved and the issue have been confined. In Kalimantan, it could engulf one of the largest land areas in the archipelago.

All the clashes, including worker demonstrations about economic conditions, are expected to worsen as the June 7 general election draws near — the first free election for 45 years.

LINKS
<http://www.sdn.or.id/sdn/ndup-new/> — Indonesian Government homepage
<http://indonesianpresident.go.id/> — Indonesian President's homepage
<http://freelandednews.com/indonesia/threeclashes.html> — A report into the Indigenous Dayaks in West Kalimantan



Indonesian police wait to board an aircraft in Jakarta yesterday before flying to Kalimantan in Borneo



Islamabad's Ghauri missile is paraded past a portrait of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. The country's untested Shaheen nuclear ballistic missile, capable of hitting deep inside India, was also put on show

Pakistan parades its nuclear arms

FROM ZAHID HUSSAIN IN ISLAMABAD

IN A show of military power, Pakistan yesterday paraded long-range nuclear ballistic missiles capable of hitting targets deep inside India as its President, Rafiq Tarar, vowed to "teach a lesson to the enemy of the nation".

Its latest and untested Shaheen missile went on display for the first time alongside the surface-to-surface Ghauri missile at a military parade to commemorate the 59th anniversary of the resolution that led to the creation of a home-

land for Muslims on the subcontinent. The Ghauri missile, with a range of 937 miles, was test-fired last April, just before Islamabad conducted a series of nuclear tests in response to India's tests. Thousands of spectators cheered as the missiles passed by.

In a vitriolic speech, Mr Tarar declared that his country could not ignore its security "while an enemy is sitting on the border". He said: "We will gouge out an evil eye cast towards us."

His scathing comments came despite fresh peace moves after a landmark meeting between Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, his Indian counterpart, in Lahore last month. The two pledged to work towards reducing the risk of accidental nuclear war and to resolve all disputes between them through negotiations.

But President Tarar said a settlement of the Kashmir dispute was the only guarantee for peace in the region.

Boer set free after killing black baby

FROM RAY KENNEDY IN JOHANNESBURG

AN AFRIKANER farmer, who shot dead a six-month-old black baby walked out of court a free man yesterday after a judge ruled that he had no intention of harming the child.

In a courtroom at Delmas, east of Johannesburg, packed with members of the dead child's family, Judge Tibbe Spoenstra ruled that the action of Nicolaas Steyn, 35, was not racially motivated but a horrible freak accident. He sentenced him to five years' jail, suspended for five years for criminal negligence.

Mr Spoenstra delivered his verdict entirely in Afrikaans, barely understood by many of those in court and it was some seconds before they realised what the ruling meant. Amid cries of outrage, Steyn hurried from the dock back to the holding cell below the courtroom instead of out of the door into the street.

Police later escorted him to his car as an angry crowd yelled "Kill the farmer, kill the Boer" tried to set upon him. The child's family said they would appeal against the verdict and an African National Congress leader said he would initiate civil proceedings against Steyn. In his ruling, Judge Spoenstra also said that Steyn could keep his gun. He said that there had been many violent and murderous attacks on white farmers and Steyn's life could be threatened if he did not have a weapon.

The court heard that the baby, Angelique Zwane, was being carried piggy-back by her 11-year-old cousin along a path close to Steyn's home on a smallholding near Benoni, east of Johannesburg. Steyn claimed he had been attacked on his smallholding before and he could not see who was on the path because of tall grass which he opened fire with a high-velocity rifle. He said he first fired a warning shot and then another round into the air, which killed Angelique and seriously wounded her cousin.



Steyn: allowed to keep his weapon

China admits a third of dams are near collapse

CHINA admitted yesterday that more than a third of its dams constructed during Maoist times when political orthodoxy counted for more than expertise were poorly-built "time bombs" needing repairs.

The official China Daily said the Government planned to reinforce 33,000 dams and dykes at an estimated cost of £2.4 billion, saying that they were "poorly built". The work had to be completed by 2010. But there were worries about lack of funds, the article said.

The reports, quoting officials of the Ministry of Water Resources, come when doubts are surfacing in surprisingly frank articles in newspapers and among some senior officials about the wisdom of building the huge Three Gorges Dam across the Yangtze river in its present form.

Some officials believe that while the dam is already too far advanced to be stopped, there should at least be some scaling back of its 610ft height, and the size of a 410-mile-long reservoir behind it.

There have been worries about corruption and poor standards in the building of bridges and other public works in the region where people have died in collapses of such works.

But, with 3,200 dams having failed since 1949, including two in Hunan province in 1975 whose collapse left hundreds of thousands of people dead according to human rights organisations, some observers here wonder whether the whole Three Gorges project

Projects hit by poor quality of work, writes James Pringle

might turn into a huge financial, social, ecological and possibly human disaster. As demonstrations break out among Chinese whose homes are to be submerged by the Yangtze, and dismay emerges among communities which have to make room and find jobs for evacuees when work is scarce anyway, the pet project of Li Peng, China's deputy leader and former Prime Minister, is being questioned as never before.

Public patience has dried up and social unrest has followed the reluctant mass exodus of people from ancestral lands. Pitched battles have been fought between farmers — claiming that their compensation for lost land has been siphoned off — and police.

"There have been certain difficulties in raising funds for the second phase of construction," the official Xinhua news agency said last week, quoting project officials.

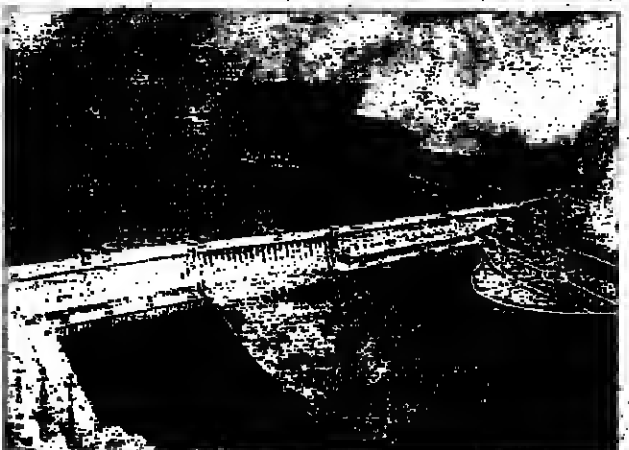
Zhu Rongji, the Prime Minister, who has never shown any enthusiasm for the dam, recently urged builders of what is the world's largest water conservation and hydro-power project to attach the utmost importance to engineering quality to ensure that the

gigantic dam "will not bring calamity to China's future generations".

"The responsibility on your shoulders is heavier than a mountain," Mr Zhu told workers at a construction site near Yichang in central Hubei province last December.

Yesterday's China Daily report shows what Mr Zhu may be driving at.

Diplomats said the reports indicated that there were diverging views in the Chinese leadership over the merits of the scheme, which some see as a Stalinist project of an earlier age designed to celebrate the legacy of Mr Li, an unpopular hardliner.



An artist's impression of the completed Three Gorges Dam in 2009. Some officials believe it is just too big

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The wrong Italian, Mr Blair

David Hine says Prodi would be yet another EU political fix

Tony Blair's taunt to the Conservatives in the House of Commons last week — that William Hague and Jacques Santer are two of a kind and miserable compromise candidates — may yet come home to haunt him if he fails to make the right choice for President of the European Commission at the Berlin summit in the next few days. Yet among the easy metaphors about the cleansing of stables and the flexing of parliamentary muscles, there has been remarkably little discussion of the qualifications required for the job.

Names are floated, and the accolades are generally effusive. Romano is our man, we are told. Carlos has a good track record. Yes, Antonio or better still Wim would do — a pity they are not available. But the real business goes on in back-channel talks hurriedly convened between Prime Ministers' offices and foreign ministries. Amid all the speculation, the one thing that cannot be voiced is a frank discussion of qualifications — at least not by those who will broker the deal. Most of the candidates do not declare themselves, and cannot, without unnecessary offence being given, be ruled out. Someone will have to get the job, and no one wants to find they have expressed doubts about the suitability of one who may be a potential winner.

Prodi's ability to manage a team is far from certain

What the citizens of Europe make of it is less clear. Do they want a President they can identify with? And if so, what exactly do they want to identify with? The low-key virtues of administrative competence — an end to cronyism, clear lines of accountability, transparency in decision-making? Or do they want strong policy leadership: a President who will lead his team from the front, rally the European Parliament behind him, impose some order on its normal mode of policy disarray (perhaps even, in a nice reversal of roles, on its own ethical standards), and communicate directly with European voters.

The superficial attraction of a strong personality is that he would impose leadership on his own Commission, a factor that was shown to be so lamentably absent by last week's scathing attack on Mr Santer's performance. He might even sack a future Edith Cresson before scandal and collective guilt engulfed the entire Commission.

Yet in have that sort of political authority poses all sorts of dangers for institutions so weakly rooted in public trust. A strengthened European Parliament is simply not going to be a disciplined one, delivering sustained support to a high-profile President. It lacks real majorities even when it has arithmetic ones. If it had the power to sack commissioners, it could use it to pick off its political enemies. There will always be plenty of those as long as the Commission remains a rainbow of national nominees of widely differing political backgrounds.

What the Commission needs is competence, a restoration of public-service values

and administrative morale, and self-imposed discipline, rather than politically imposed leadership. How far that conclusion has been fed into the mixed motives of those who will take the decision for us is unclear. A heavyweight Prime Minister is said to be needed. Preferably a Southern European — presumably because he is going to have to sell some painful cuts in transfer payments as enlargement of the European Union approaches. There is much talk of the need for a good communicator too: a man of the political middle with wide appeal.

All this is said to point to Romano Prodi, Mr Blair's erstwhile ally in the "Democratic International" that the Prime Minister, Bill Clinton, and Signor Prodi formed last year — just before Signor Prodi was ousted in a coalition coup by the leader of Italy's real social democrats, Massimo D'Alema.

Signor Prodi certainly has his merits. But most Europeans know little of what Italians have been able to test first-hand. And the same applies to all the other candidates. The spotlight will fall very selectively. Heads of government who need to fix a deal that meets short-term considerations have no incentive to turn up its power.

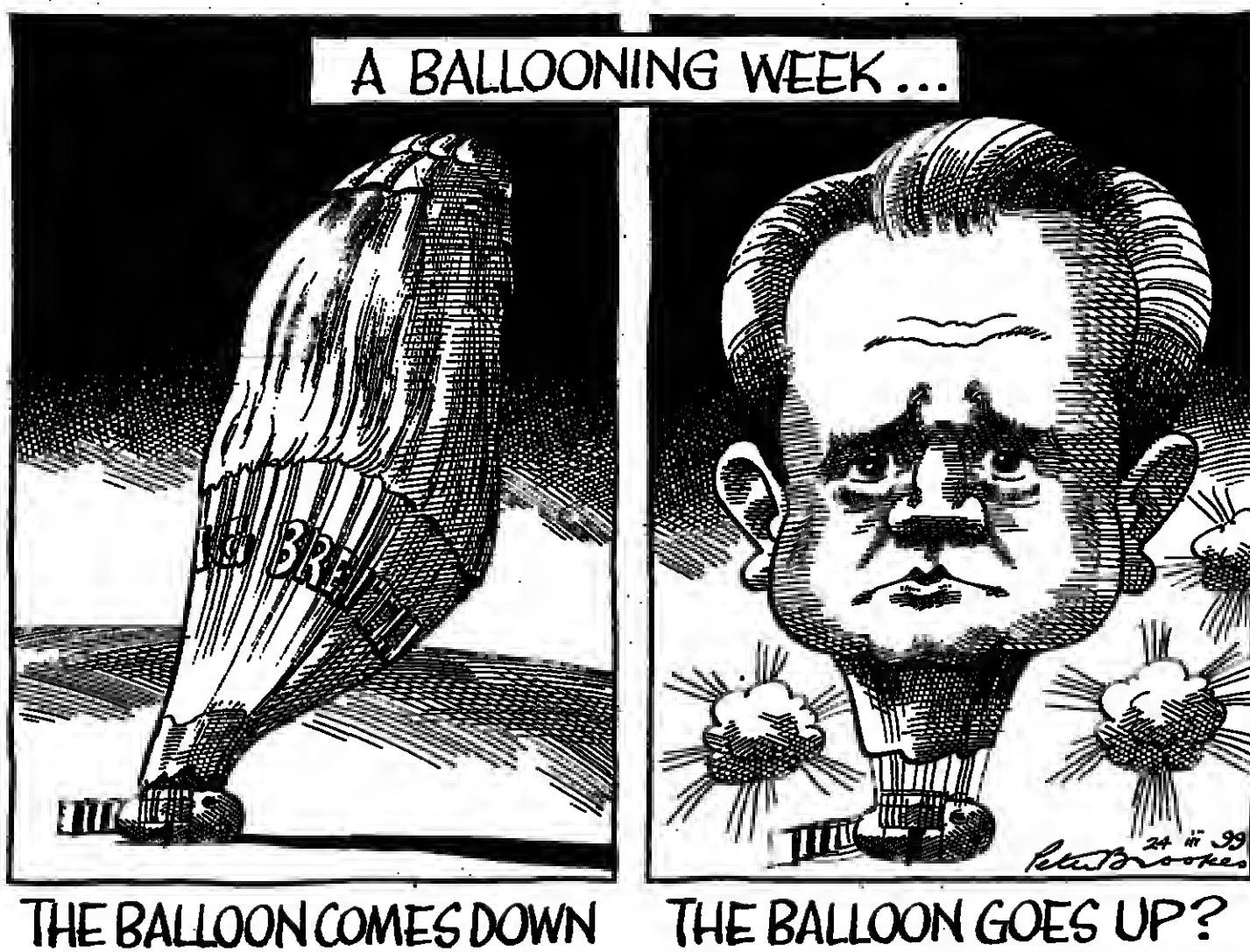
In Signor Prodi's case, for example, Signor D'Alema's coup has tried the patience with efforts to build a more united Italian Left. Signor Prodi has since done his best to make life difficult for his successor, forming a new group, the Democrats, to challenge Signor D'Alema in the European elections this June. The affair has cast much doubt over Signor Prodi's capacity to manage a team and a parliamentary majority. Like Mr Blair, he has built his appeal on transcending conventional political boundaries. But unlike Mr Blair, his political base was always uncertain, at times positively evanescent. It is difficult to believe it would carry much weight at the European level.

When the history of Italy's remarkable reform process in the 1990s is written, the real accolade may go to Giuliano Amato — currently Signor D'Alema's Minister for Institutional Reform. As the first reforming Prime Minister of the decade, it was Signor Amato who took the really tough decisions on budgetary reform and privatisation. He established a pattern that others, Signor Prodi included, have had an easier time emulating. Signor Amato faced a credibility crisis in Italian institutions much like that facing Brussels and steered Italy through with great skill.

If Signor Prodi becomes Commission President, it may have more to do with superficial political convenience — as it did in Jacques Santer's case — than because it is self-evidently what is needed.

comment@the-times.co.uk

The author is Fellow in Politics, Christ Church, Oxford.



THE BALLOON COMES DOWN

THE BALLOON GOES UP?

The real catastrophe

No amount of Nato bombing will make Milosevic see sense in Kosovo

Why Kosovo? Why, of all the current civil wars and humanitarian horrors, is it Kosovo that now summons British troops to the colours? Or put it another way, why does a bloodstained shroud only have to wave over a Balkan village for otherwise intelligent people to take leave of their senses?

Yesterday the West tossed another gauntlet before the Yugoslav leader, Slobodan Milosevic. All previous ultimatums have been bluffs, and he has called them. In response to a month of Nato sabre-rattling, he has unleashed on Kosovo a pre-emptive scorched-earth campaign of medieval brutality. Now squadrons of bombers are waiting to pulverise his country, and 10,000 Nato troops stand ready to invade from Macedonia. Yet a BBC interviewer yesterday could gasp "How can Milosevic be so stupid?" A wise general never asks that question of his enemy, only of his friends.

In the early 1960s, Americans considered it unthinkable that a modern President such as John Kennedy could entangle the United States in a third land war in the Far East within 20 years. It was simply beyond imagining that, in a nuclear age, American boys would ever again be fighting in distant jungles. The world was too safe and Kennedy too shrewd and too liberal to make such a mistake. Besides, America was omnipotent. The orientals would be no match for the rolling thunder of the world's mightiest air force.

The historian Barbara Tuchman famously addressed the puzzle of Vietnam and concluded that, in the matter of war, little had changed since the fall of Troy. In *The March of Folly*, she related how each crisis was confounded by vain and hesitant leaders, by fears of retreat, by deafness to unpalatable advice and by a constant belief "that there was no choice". Kennedy had to take America into Vietnam to prove he was tough on communism, and Lyndon Johnson to prove that "I am not going to lose it". After half a million dead, it was lost. Nothing was gained, and it appears nothing was learnt.

I cannot find a single strategist to give me a level-headed outline of Britain's war aims in Yugoslavia. Everything said by Tony Blair and others in the Commons yesterday amounted to fine words and posturing: "Punish Milosevic... teach

him a lesson... send a message... credibility of Nato at stake". So far, a year of intervention has been a disaster for those whom it was meant to benefit. A minority of Kosovan militants have been encouraged to believe that Nato troops will help them to win their freedom from the Serbs. They have committed atrocities and provoked counter-atrocities from the Serbs. They have provoked a powerful and ruthless Government to repress areas of the country which it had previously ruled un-

democratically but not murderously. The objective set out by Mr Blair yesterday appears to be to bomb the Serbs into granting partial autonomy to Kosovo. It is scarcely credible that a serious person can believe this will be done by bombs — least of all after the Iraqi experience — and Mr Blair was unable to say how. The action seems certain both to kill more civilians and to provoke bloody retaliation against the Kosovans which Nato is powerless to prevent. What kind of humanitarianism is that?

The policy appears to be rooted in a belief that President Milosevic was "made to see sense by bombing" in Bosnia. As General Sir Michael Rose, the former commander in Bosnia, angrily repeated yesterday, this is just not true. The real prelude to the 1995 ceasefire was the Serbs losing a land war with the Croats in southern Bosnia and fighting to a stalemate round Sarajevo. Mr Milosevic had already achieved his strategic goal of de facto partition. If bombing "brought him to his senses" then, why has the threat of more severe bombing not done so now?

Bombing is irrelevant. The issue in all territorial disputes is the military balance on the ground. In Kosovo that balance is now overwhelmingly Serbian. Nato spin is

act sooner before it allowed Mr Milosevic to deploy his full army on his southern front facing Nato? If British troops are to die in the cause of Kosovan autonomy, this delay will seem criminally negligent.

The frantic hope of the interveners must be that Mr Milosevic might, yet again, offer them some fig-leaf for their retreat. He has virtually invited a bombing raid, which may make Nato feel better for a while, but what is surely inconceivable is that the Serb leader will suddenly withdraw what is one of Central Europe's biggest armies from defending what Serbs regard as their territory. He may bluff and bluster yet again. Yet as the Tories indicated, and most Labour MPs believe, there is still not the will among any Nato country to invade any part of Yugoslavia and confront Mr Milosevic's army on the ground. Even suppose, just suppose, a

miracle occurs. Suppose Mr Milosevic does back away, then what? The objective as stated by Mr Blair is for Serb and Albanian Kosovans to live in peace with each other in an autonomous, democratic province of Yugoslavia. The implicit model is Bosnia. Yet for almost four years Bosnia has been a UN protectorate under a High Representative, and it is likely to stay that way for the foreseeable future. The country is militarily dependent on Nato and financially dependent on aid, with one of the world's most subsidised populations, costing the rest of us more than \$1,000 per head a year.

The attempt to make Bosnia a democracy is described this week in a devastating analysis by David Chandler, *Bosnia: Faking Democracy after Dayton* (Pluto). It is a farce. The country is ruled by an army of some 50,000 foreign soldiers and UN staff, who run or regulate its executive, its bank, its police force, its aid distribution and its media, holding periodic "elections" that are no more than tribal opinion polls. They are upholding a temporary peace and a vast edifice of international job-creation. They will never leave. As Chandler points out, "the one solution that has not been advocated by the international community... is that of letting the Bosnian people begin to work out their own way forward".

The desperate irony of the present crisis is that the least worst outcome for the Kosovans is to become such a UN colony. To achieve it they will have to endure enough bloodshed to induce Nato leaders to match threats with deeds, to invade and somehow drive Serb forces off Kosovan territory. The suffering will be horrific and the result for Kosovo will be not autonomy but merely freedom from the Serbs.

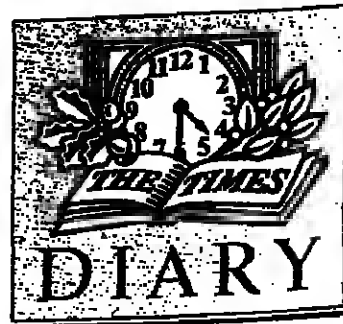
The fact is, we should have left Kosovo's separatists to fight their own battles, as we normally leave separatists round the world. We should have offered such help as charity can supply. But charity no longer wins headlines. Only bombs do that. When the blood flows, we yearn to meddle. When the meddling is mixed with machismo, it gets out of hand. It has now brought Nato possibly and Kosovo certainly to a catastrophe. Of course the fault lies with the monstrous Milosevic, but not all the fault.

comment@the-times.co.uk

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Simon Jenkins



Jilted lady

FAMILY ghosts haunt Inverary Castle, the pre-scandal home of Margaret Duchess of Argyll. When the late duke flung his wife over the drawbridge before their testing "Polaroid and pearl necklace" divorce in 1963, he also ejected an 88 by 58 oil (detail below) of the duchess by Sir James Gunn.

Now the portrait, felicitously benefiting from recent publicity, has been spurned by the 12th Duke. He was offered it by Philip Mould, the dealer specialising in British portraits who was selling on behalf of Nicky Armstrong, the duchess's closest chum in later years.

The latest coverage has pushed its value to £48,000, a snip for the duke. "There is still a lot of bitterness at Inverary," Armstrong suggests. "The duke said, diplomatically, that there was nothing he wanted to displace from the castle walls to make way for it."



GENERAL PINOCHET's reputation extends to his family. His nephew Hernan is doing one of those "how to be a journalist" courses here. For homework, he doctored his uncle: but the iron general refused to squawk.

■ A CHIEF executive could be appointed to run the House of Commons if an official report is implemented. The Serjeant at Arms has recommended that a Sir John Harvey-Jones-type troubleshooter be appointed to sweep away archaic practices. Michael Braithwaite is reporting to the Commons Commission shortly. "Departments just don't talk," I am told. "We need someone to slap wrists."

Officially, the Serjeant says: "We have been sounded out, but will not comment until the report lands."

■ RECENT news while up at Cambridge, Eddie George could not write an essay on growth and dynamics. The Governor of the Bank of England told me not to worry: "I am still working on it."

■ AT LEAST he can make trains run on time. Arriving at Dartington station on Saturday lunchtime, Tony Blair took his security monkeys for tea after finding he had to wait 15 minutes for his late-running train south. After he finally clambered aboard, the train sailed along, stopping only briefly at stations as GNER staff uttered ever more profuse apologies. When they eventually pulled into Stevenage — the nearest stop for Chequers — it was just 30 seconds late.



■ A "CELEBRITY terrorist" who spoke out against the peace process has been threatened by the IRA. Dolours Price, wife of Stephen Rea, the star of the IRA thriller *The Crying Game*, went into the dink for a bombing campaign. But after attacking Sinn Féin's move towards peace (sorry?), Price says she has been harassed: "I've had people come to my door. I've been told I have no right to speak, even though I am a lifelong republican."

NOT one for the Diary Towers library, I fear: a picture-driven periodical called Just Legal has been joined by a bedmate, *Nearly Legal*. One for m'learned friends!

■ LORD PALUMBO flogging the family silver? Christie's is holding an auction of 20th-century art including a work by Arman called *Barracuda*. The "meal" saws mounted on a metal support, valued at £12,000, is described as the "property of a family trust". A visitor saw it in a crate marked with Palumbo's name. I trust his son James, the nightclub owner, is happy: they confronted each other in court four years ago to establish who controls the family trust.

JASPER GERARD

'Hollywood's obsession with William Shakespeare — our exclusive preview of the next ten sequels, going from Bard to worse'

Giles Coren

With the success of *Shakespeare in Love* at the Oscars, Los Angeles is apparently desperate for Bard-orientated scripts. One young cineaste has already put together a series of pitches for Hollywood, a copy of which has been leaked to *The Times*:

Saving Private Bardolph: The field of Agincourt, 1415. The King's old buddy Bardolph has gone down behind enemy lines and a team of longbowmen led by Jack Falstaff (Tom Hanks) will look great in fat make-up) has to go in and get him the hell out. They do, the French are whipped, and we end with Pistol (Will Smith) observing that "Homies now about in Harlem shall think themselves accursed they were not here!"

Tempest! Forget the island, in *Tempest!* we go big on the shipwreck itself. Miranda (Kate Winslet, Gwyneth Paltrow?) is

the daughter of oil-tycoon Prospero (Michael Caine) who lives on the island. She is travelling back with her fiancé, the rich but monstrous Caliban (Song) to be married. Then she meets Sebastian (Leonardo DiCaprio) who, despite being brother to the King of Naples, is travelling steerage and is a great dancer. Just as Miranda and Sebastian get down to it, the tempest starts and the ship goes down. Everyone freezes to death except Miranda. **Banquo: First Blood II:** He's back, and this time it's personal. It wasn't a ghost at all. Banquo survived (can Ewan McGregor beef up or do we go with Jean-Claude Van Damme?) and today, trained in deadly arts by the three weird ninjas, he is back to revenge himself and claim the throne of Scotland.

Learn as Folk: Old Queen Lear (numerous options) is losing his marbles and has to divide his

gay-porn empire between his three homosexual sons — Nathan, Stuart and Vince. Based in the Canal Street area of Manchester, the tragedy begins with two of the three sons unhappy with the size of their portions. After frolics with a hermit called poor Tom, and the tending of a gimp known as "The Fool", the two bad "sisters" die in a shoot-out and the wronged one moves to Miami to set up a design studio.

Pericles, Prince of Tides: Surely Nick Nolte's last chance for an Oscar. Pericles (Nolte) sails for Tarsus to get over revelations of incest and relieve a famine. He is hard-drinking, hard-living, and hard on himself. But then he meets a lovely therapist called Thaisa (Barbra Streisand), who cures him, and helps him to find the hero inside

himself. Supporting role for Judi Dench as the King of Antioch.

Desdemona Does Dallas (or, The Whore of Venice): Othello was right. Desdemona is a nymphomaniac who beds everything in sight. Des works her way through Lodovico, Cassio, Roderigo and the rest, and in the great orgy scene at the end of the play Othello (Luther Vandross) delivers his famous line "Put up your bright swords for the dew will rust them", which, in this context, takes on an entirely new meaning. The scene in which Des (Gwyneth) and Iago (Robert Benini) get up to no good with a handkerchief will surely go down as a classic of the genre.

No Weddings and Four Hundred Funerals: Charming Titus (Hugh Grant) wakes up one morning to find he is late for the

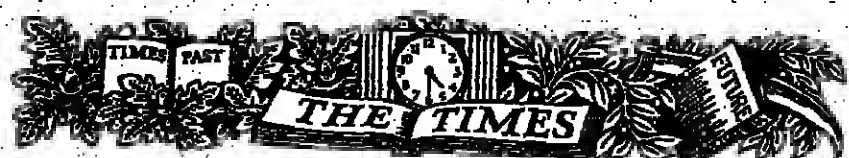
slaughter. Swearing his way across London in morning dress he lays waste to everyone, finally basking the sons of Tamara, Queen of the Goths (Gwyneth?) in a pie and feeding them to her.

Shylock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels: Huddled out of his life's savings at a poker game fixed by Shylock and his hoodlums, Antonio has 24 hours to come up with the cash or forfeit a pound of flesh. But he is not called the Merchant of Venice for nothing — and soon puts together a drug heist that will solve all his problems. In the final act Shylock (Jy Stallone) asks "if you prick us, do we not bleed?" to which Vinnie Jones (Arnold Schwarzenegger) replies "let's find out, shall we?" and blasts him with his sawn-off friend.

Light Sabres Lost: Star Wars meets early comedy. For Navarre, read Death Star. Confusion of identity with Luke Skywalker

killing a man who turns out to be his father, and falling in love with a woman who turns out to be his sister. But all turns out well when Chewbacca reveals himself to be a female wookiee in disguise. They fall in love.

There's Something About Ophelia: On the day of the big funeral, young Hamlet (Keanu Reeves) has been promised a date with Ophelia (Gwyneth?), the fairest maid in school. While waiting at Polonius's house for her to change for the party he gets his manhood caught in his codpiece and has to be carted off to hospital. Years later he returns to woo her again, but inadvertently mislays some genetic material which, by a hilarious sequence of events, ends up in Ophelia's hair. She rushes off to wash it out in a brook but, leaning on a willow that grows aslant it, she falls in and drowns. Hamlet, doomed to die a virgin, kills everybody.



NATO AND KOSOVO

Blair makes an effective case for airstrikes against Serbia

The case for military intervention in Kosovo is strong but the Government has often appeared reluctant to articulate it. Yet the scale of the undertaking in itself and the wider implications for Nato demand a more intense public debate than that which hitherto has been held. Tony Blair's emergency statement to the House of Commons yesterday was thus directed as much to the wider public as the assembled parliamentarians. As the Prime Minister will be out of the country for the next few days it was wise as well as proper for him to have taken this opportunity to explain the Government's position. By the time he returns from Berlin, British forces may well be engaged in an armed conflict of unknown intensity and duration.

The already dire situation in Kosovo, as Mr Blair emphasised with deliberate reference to the Srebrenica massacre in 1995, has dramatically worsened in the past 72 hours. Slobodan Milosevic, the Yugoslav President, is using what time and space Nato allows him to pursue a scorched earth policy of extreme brutality. Whether this is gratuitous cruelty, or a pre-emptive partitioning of Kosovo in order to change the terms of future negotiations, is uncertain. What is clear are the consequences of his strategy, highly discriminate slaughter and the systematic razing of Kosovar villages. The exodus of 25,000 additional refugees since the Paris talks collapsed means, as Mr Blair said, that 250,000 Kosovars are again homeless. This is a humanitarian catastrophe.

There are many awful conflicts in this world, most of which pass without outside intervention. But this particular tragedy is being enacted on Europe's stage. Nato can and must intervene. The beginning and end of this tragedy, as Mr Blair noted, can be traced back to Belgrade. It started ten years ago when Mr Milosevic withdrew the autonomy that Tito had awarded to the

Kosovans. It should have stopped last October when, faced by the threat of Nato airstrikes, he promised to call off his troops and paramilitaries, let terrorised civilians return to their homes and pursue a political settlement. That promise, like so many others from Mr Milosevic, has proved hollow. Nato must act against Serbia or betray the Kosovans and see the region once again perilously destabilised.

This hard truth has persuaded 13 Nato nations, some of them not always inclined to the use of force, to offer some 200 aircraft for this operation. It would seem that Britain and the United States are of one mind about inflicting such damage on the Yugoslav Army as to alter Mr Milosevic's calculations. Anything short of such an assault would be absolutely folly. The most difficult question for military planners and political leaders alike remains less the selection of targets over the next few days than what comes afterwards. It has been suggested that the initial reaction of ordinary Serbs will be to rally round their leadership. Thus, many critics will contend, in the Balkans as in Iraq, external firepower will simply strengthen a dictator.

This is a superficially neat but ultimately flawed analogy. It ignores the fact that the consequences of failing to act in either Iraq or Serbia would be considerable. It also treats two separate situations as indistinguishable. For all Mr Milosevic's efforts at repression, opposition exists in Serbia in a manner unimaginable in Baghdad. The Yugoslav Army is an institution with a distinct sense of its interests. Major Serbian cities are controlled by Mr Milosevic's rivals and opposition to the war in Kosovo is edging Montenegro, the only other republic that has remained within Yugoslavia, towards independence. There is, in short, a real prospect that a determined Nato campaign can achieve its military and political objectives.

DISCORDS FOR SCHRODER

The German presidency has not lived up to its promises

As Gerhard Schröder first imagined it, Germany's six-month presidency of the European Union would speed up the political integration of a Europe stretching both west and east of Berlin. Ambitious reforms of the EU's finances would hasten enlargement and please tax-conscious German voters, too. Herr Schröder promised a cut in Germany's 48 billion net annual contributions. Success would have the added benefit of enabling the untested German Chancellor to shed the shadow of Helmut Kohl, his Christian Democrat predecessor and Europe's dominant voice.

Herr Schröder was so confident of applause that he had this week's summit on Agenda 2000, the blueprint for budgetary reform, moved from Brussels to Berlin. But events have stalled his plans. Today, as the 15 leaders begin their talks, both Germany and the European Union are jangling with discord. The abrupt resignation of the scandal-ridden Santer Commission on March 16 creates a vacuum that the summit must address. Kosovo is again in flames, in a crisis that underlines yet again how dependent peace in Europe is on the resolve of the United States.

Meanwhile, the restructuring of the EU's finances, essential before admitting new members including Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, is far from settled. The farm ministers' botched reform of the common agricultural policy has achieved the remarkable feat of displeasing France and Britain almost equally. Southern states are clinging to regional and structural

subsidies which are, in most cases, unjustifiable. And in the battle to reapportion costs so that Germany can pay less, Britain has no intention of letting its £2 billion-a-year rebate be made the sacrificial lamb. Herr Schröder's pre-summit European tour last week achieved so little that German opponents accused him of applying to the crisis-ridden EU his domestic penchant for indecisiveness.

Herr Schröder has found it as hard to unite Germans as to bring together the rest of Europe. He has yet to capitalise on the resignation of his Finance Minister, Oskar Lafontaine, on March 12. There is muttering on his party's Left that could surface noisily when it votes to crown him as Social Democrat Party chairman. And German industrialists are livid that the disputed Lafontaine tax reform, shifting more of the tax burden from wage-earners to employers, survived Red Oskar's departure.

Herr Schröder has pleaded with colleagues to "stop singing with many voices". To make them do so, however, he needs a successful EU presidency, and a deal on finances at Berlin, more than ever. His desperation has already produced expensive compromises and the tacit shelving of Germany's demand for lower net contributions. The danger is that a weakened Herr Schröder might be willing to pay too high a price for a face-saving deal by tomorrow night. Failure to overhaul EU spending now will put paid to early enlargement. That would be a grave disservice to the Europe that Germany claims to want.

LORD OF LIBERTY

The legacy of Max Beloff to the British idea

"History," Max Beloff once observed, "is not there to be quarried out of archives; it is the residue of what has passed through an individual mind." With Lord Beloff's death, this country has lost not just one of the few orators still capable of intervening pithily in the Lords without stooping to a prepared text, but an astute and eloquent sifter of Britain's constitutional and imperial record and the implications of that history for this country's relations with America and continental Europe.

A multilingual scholar or in postwar Soviet foreign policy as he was with Stuart England or the British Empire, Max Beloff brought both to his prolific writings and to his political interventions a fascination with what he saw as the uniquely sturdy British correlation of liberty and robust common law. For him, as for many other intellectuals whose family came to imperial Britain from pre-revolutionary Russia, "liberty under the law" was Britain's singular achievement.

His was a highly polemical conservatism: although he took the Conservative whip after becoming a life peer, the small "c" was more pertinent to an intellect rooted in a determination to resist whatever risks Britain's incremental but unbroken centuries of constitutional evolution, the process which had absorbed universal suffrage and political accountability within existing structures.

Lord Beloff was at his most impishly iconoclastic when tiding at whatever "drearly political orthodoxy of the moment"

might impair respect for these quintessentially British household gods. This was true when he was fighting for excellence in university education: he gave up his chair at Oxford to head the private University of Buckingham out of a belief that state intervention was eroding academic autonomy and standards. It was true still when he was questioning the wisdom of devolution for Scotland and Wales.

The same regard for historical perspective was the basis of his opposition to Britain's deepening engagement in European union. By birthright and learning, he was too profoundly a European himself for this stance to bear any trace of xenophobia. He simply believed that a federal Europe could not work because it yoked together historical, legal and constitutional experiences that were incompatible. None but British politicians, he convincingly argued in such books as *Britain and European Union*, had ever pretended that anything less than a federal Europe was the goal.

Nothing depressed him more than the claims by British politicians that the economic and constitutional implications of the European Union, and EMU in particular, could be treated as separate. This week he reached the end of a long life which was begun, as he laconically put it, "in the consulate of Herbert Henry Asquith" when the Empire "was as much a part of the order of things as the moon or the stars". Lord Beloff was that paradox, a pragmatic reactionary. For "reaction" was a necessary form of reflection, he would have said, on what history has bequeathed of most value to the modern world.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN Telephone 0171-782 5000

'Undemocratic' rules on European appointments

From Lord Shore of Stepney

Sir, Signor Prodi, front-runner for the vacant presidency of the European Commission, is indeed a committed federalist (leading article, March 18) and that fact, for both operational and political reasons, is a major handicap. The swollen powers and functions of the Commission must be reduced. But to expect a fervent federalist to carry out that task is simply ridiculous: the Commission has acquired the present powers and functions not just because of the usual institutional aggrandisement, but because its mission and role under the treaties is to help forge that "ever-closer union" leading on to a federal state.

There is an additional operational reason. The Commission, under its two former federalist Presidents, Jacques Delors and Jacques Santer, has long known the abuses that the Committee of Independent Experts has so publicly revealed. Yet nothing was done.

They, just as much as Prodi, are men of integrity. But in their anxiety to further the European cause and to do nothing to discredit or damage the reputation of their institutions, they and their senior officials turned a blind eye to what was going on. The same problem faced the European Parliament and accounts for the extraordinary dilatoriness of that body in tackling fraud and abuse.

It is surely inconceivable that our Prime Minister (report, March 23), with a veto on appointment, would allow the most powerful post in Europe to be filled by an advocate of a European federal state which he, in both opposition and government, has pledged himself to oppose.

Yours sincerely,
PETER SHORE
House of Lords,
March 23.

From Mr Bryan Cassidy, MEP for Dorset and East Devon (European People's Party Parliamentary Group (Conservative))

Sir, Reports today that the rejected Jacques Santer may become one of Luxembourg's MEPs confirm the undemocratic way in which most EU countries put on their lists ex-commissioners and ex-ministers, pushing off hard-working, conscientious MEPs.

Pinochet verdict

From Professor Alan Maynard and Mr Tom Sackville

Sir, Last week we were separately in Chile, where the delays by the law lords in dealing with the Pinochet case are causing uncertainty and concern in the run-up to presidential elections. It appeared to us that their Lordships' excessive delay in reaching a decision has had unfortunate, though wholly avoidable, consequences for the internal affairs of another State.

Two of them, Lord Saville of Newdigate and Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers, are engaged elsewhere, chairing public inquiries into the Bloody Sunday shootings and BSE (report, February 28). Their selection, in conjunction with the earlier controversy surrounding Lord Hoffmann, has called into question the efficiency, and damaged the international reputation, of the English legal system.

Yours faithfully,
ALAN MAYNARD,
Co-director, York Health Policy Group,
TOM SACKVILLE,
Chief Executive, International Federation of Health Funds,
c/o York Health Policy Group,
IRISS D Block,
University of York, YO10 5DD,
March 22.

Tory reselection

From Mr Martin Ball

Sir, At long last, the Conservative Party's grassroots members are shaking off any remaining vestiges of deference (report, "Tory activists demand secret votes on MPs", March 15). The concern, however, is that such a reform will be hijacked by local association bigwigs to strengthen their power.

To prevent this happening, William Hague should be leading his rank-and-file members in the creation of a genuinely participatory party democracy.

Yours faithfully,
MARTIN BALL,
38 Greyhound Lane, SW16 5SB.

Noise warning

From Dr Michael Gresty

Sir, "Music and brain power" (Education, March 19) depicts a baby wearing headphones. Under no circumstances, other than for medical assessment, should a baby or young child be exposed to any sound in this manner. The intensities cannot be adequately monitored.

Headphones are a potential source of uncomfortable levels of sound which may damage hearing irreparably in both children and adults.

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL GRESTY,
Medical Research Council,
National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery,
8-11 Queen Square, WC1N 3BG,
March 19.

The United Kingdom and Ireland are the only countries where the citizens decide who are to represent them, because both vote for individuals, not party lists. Unfortunately, thanks to the particularly undemocratic form of PR foisted on this country by the Government, we shall become like the rest of the EU. The Labour Party lists for the European election have been drawn up to accommodate "Tony's cronies" and "Labour hives", removing some serving MEPs whose views do not accord with current orthodoxy.

In view of critical remarks about the Commission "parachuting" its favourites into top jobs, I am surprised that its ex-President should expect to be parachuted into the European Parliament.

Yours sincerely,
BRYAN CASSIDY,
European Parliament,
Rue Wiertz, B-1047 Brussels,
March 20.

From Professor A. A. Dashwood

Sir, Your contention that the reappointment of any members of the European Commission presided over by Mr Santer would be illegal (leading article, March 17) relies on Article 159 of the EC treaty, which states that a vacancy caused by resignation "shall be filled for the remainder of the member's term of office by a new member".

Article 159 is about the legal consequences of the premature ending of the terms of office of individual Commission members or the President. The authors must have assumed that members who resigned would not seek reappointment; hence references to "a new member" and to members remaining in office "until they have been replaced".

The case of a resignation en bloc followed by individual reappointment seems not to have been expressly provided for. That being so, it would be wrong to interpret the treaty as fettering the political discretion of those choosing the members who will hold office until January 2000.

Ministers who resign under a doctrine of collective responsibility are not thereby disqualified from holding office in the next government. The hurdle they must surmount is a political, not a legal one; and so, the

London's water table

From Professor R. J. Mair, FEng

Sir, Warnings of the damage London could suffer from a rising water table (report, March 11) are unduly alarmist.

It is important to distinguish between the shallow water table (which is generally found a few metres below ground level) and the deep-water table in the aquifer of sand and chalk that lies at great depth in the London area below thick clay strata. It is only the latter which is now rising by as much as three metres a year, having been lowered considerably by pumping from wells since the Industrial Revolution; this rise is a result of the industrial pumping having now ceased.

Before the Industrial Revolution, a high artesian water table in the deep aquifer of sands and chalk fed the fountains of Trafalgar Square, as your illustration showed, but the combination of thick clay, overlying gravels and the draining effect of streams and the River Thames prevented the shallow water table from rising to flood levels; this would also apply today.

The concerns you mention about the effects of the rising water table on, for example, London's Tube system, buildings with deep foundations and basements, underground car parks and deep services are, indeed, justified. These are principally about differential movements and possible leakage, and it therefore makes good sense to consider controlling the rising water table by installing a scheme of new pumping boreholes — as proposed by various organisations, including Thames Water.

Even if no deep-level pumping scheme is initiated, however, buildings will not "pop out of the ground" like jack-in-the-boxes.

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT MAIR,
Department of Engineering,
University of Cambridge,
Trumpington Street,
Cambridge CB2 1PZ,
rjm50@eng.cam.ac.uk
March 11.

Ulster divide

From Mr Conor White

Sir, It was with a mixture of horror and fascination that I read Ruth Dudley Edwards's review of *Loyalists* by Peter Taylor (Books, March 18). Did I read correctly that "because of the values of the Ulster Protestant culture from which they spring, loyalists tend to be more honest than republicans, so for the most part, Taylor's interviews elicit truth rather than propaganda"?

What a balanced view! This type of thinking is exactly, in my view, what ensures that an end to the Troubles is a far-off dream, for it is in the mind that peace begins.

Yours truly,
CONOR WHITE,
237 Upper Richmond Road,
Putney, SW16 6SN,
March 18.

Balloon record

From Professor Harry McWilliam

Sir, There is surely only one way to cap the magnificent achievement of Jones and Picard (leading article, March 22), and that is to circumnavigate the Earth by balloon, at the same time crossing the Equator.

Yours sincerely,
HARRY MCWILLIAM,
Lewins, Lewins Road,
Chalfont St Peter,
Buckinghamshire SL9 8SA,
harrymcwill@aol.com
March 22.

Letters to the Editor that are intended for publication should carry a daytime telephone number. They may be sent to a fax number — 0171-782 5046. e-mail to: letters@the-times.co.uk

Bottled spell to fend off witches

From Dr A. G. Massey

Sir, Having just finished a detailed study of a late-17th-century witch bottle, I was interested to note that witchcraft was again on the increase (interview, "Why I gave it all up to become a witch", March 19).

Witch bottles were white magic devices used to protect homes from the malpractice of roving witches in days when people would have needed more in the way of reassurance than Phyllis Curot's blithe "nor do we cast spells to harm people".

This green glass wine bottle, dating from about 1685, had been sealed with a cork and beeswax before being buried upside down under a Surrey cottage. It was about half-filled with an aqueous solution of sodium nitrate, potassium nitrate and calcium sulphate, the latter undoubtedly arising from hard water.

A brownish sediment contained all manner of things, many only in minute amounts: silica, calcium phosphate, calcium carbonate, plant debris, part of an insect's leg, human(?) hair, wool fibres, linen fibres, cotton fibres (colourless, pink, blue and black), small pointed hairs (eyelashes?) and one or two unidentified animal hairs.

The most exquisite additions were nine, hand-made, brass pins about 22mm long. They had all been carefully bent into the form of a letter L as a single bunch and, from the angles, it was possible to deduce which pins had been at the front or the back of the group during bending. Each tiny pin, barely 0.64mm in diameter, had a head made by wrapping fine wire twice around the shank and was also partially covered by a coating of black copper sulphide.

Other witch bottles were mentioned in several editions of *The Times* during 1954 (article, February 15; letters, March 8, 19 and 24).

The practice, which we may scoff at nowadays, shows just how terrified people were of the supernatural in bygone eras.

Yours faithfully,
A. G. MASSEY,
Birklands, 214 Forest Road,
Loughborough LE11 3HU,
alan@birklands.demon.co.uk
March 22.

'Looted' art

From the Director of the Tate Gallery

Sir, The comment in your diary today that "the huge Nazi art scandal that hit the National Gallery is set to engulf the Tate" is pure sensationalism. British national museums and galleries are, in fact, leading the world on this issue and are the first institutions internationally to agree to systematically and painstakingly research their collections to ensure that they do not contain works of art which might have been looted by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945.

This has been welcomed by organisations worldwide including the Holocaust Educational Trust, which sees the initiative as an example to museums around the world.

Earlier this month, the National Gallery made public a list of 120 of its paintings over which there might be uncertainty about provenance during the vital war years (report, March 2) and of these only eight to ten appear to give grounds for possible concern.

Every other national museum and gallery in the country is currently preparing an action plan outlining the research that it will undertake.

Our initial work suggests that it is unlikely that more than a handful of works in British collections will be open to dispute.

Yours faithfully,
NICHOLAS SEROTA,
Director,
Tate Gallery,
Millbank, SW1P 4RG,
March 17.

Wedding gifts

From Mr James Lancelot

Sir, Perhaps the most unusual wedding present my wife and I received (letter, March 18) was a pair of books, *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* and *The Oxford Companion to the Christian Church*. They were not on our list, yet 16 years on they remain among the most valued and most used of our presents.

They have not suffered breakage, they do not require washing or polishing, but they do solve many an argument.

Yours faithfully,
JAMES LANCELOT,
6 The College,
Durham DH1 3EQ,
March 18.

From Mr J. M. Cockram

Sir, Having an interest in antique English silver I have for years always given a Georgian or Victorian silver butter knife as a wedding present.

Such a historical gift is usually well received, although I was worried by one young bride who, some time after the event, did query the receipt of only one fish knife.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN COCKRAM,
Robin Cottage,
Sway Road, Brockenhurst,
Hampshire SO42 7RX,
March 22.

OBITUARIES

LORD BELOFF

Lord Beloff, FBA, Gladstone Professor of Government and Public Administration, Oxford University, 1957-74, and founding Principal of the University College at Buckingham, died on March 22 aged 85. He was born on July 2, 1913.

In so far as Britain has an equivalent of a continental-style intelligentsia, Max Beloff was one of its leading lights. The son of a cultured Russian Jewish immigrant, he was a scholar, journalist, historian, polemicist and politician, but above all he was a controversialist who never felt more comfortable than when engaged in argument. His themes were never petty. The rise and fall of empires and great powers, modern attitudes to education, the future of the nation state: these were some of the subjects that engaged his sparkling, highly confrontational brain.

One of his best books was entitled *The Intellectual in Politics*, and unlike many scholars, Beloff believed that a good intellect carried with it the responsibility to engage in the political process. Along with many other prominent men of the late 1970s — Hugh Thomas, Paul Johnson, Alan Chaffont, Reginald Prentice, Woodrow Wyatt, Kingsley Amis and Bernard Levin among them — Beloff made the transition from left to right, largely prompted by the sight of over-mighty trade unionism. It was the exodus of men such as him that gave Thatcherism an overall intellectual depth that its economic policies alone would not have merited.

Beloff became one of the leading lights of what was then called the New Right, and used think-tanks such as the Centre for Policy Studies, the Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism and the Institute of Economic Affairs to try to keep the Conservative Governments of the 1980s up to the ideological mark. His anti-collectivist views on education were put into bricks and mortarboards when he became the founder and Principal of the private University College at Buckingham (now the University of Buckingham), which allowed him to test principles he had been propagating since the 1960s. Lord Beloff ended his days as the foremost intellectual figure of the Eurosceptic movement, where he used his considerable knowledge of constitutional matters — he had written the textbook on *The Government of the United Kingdom* in 1980 — to attack the Major and Blair Governments over moves towards closer European integration. However, that particular argument progresses, few thinkers have had so profound an influence on the life of the country in the postwar period.

Beloff's central argument was that history, rather than what he called "the pretensions of political scientists", gave the best clue both to national character and to the future political direction of

peoples. The past, he said, can give suggestions and intimations that set the "imagination working", and he made it his life's work to set as many imaginations working as possible.

Max Beloff was the oldest child of a gifted Jewish family. Like so many Russian Jews, his father, Simon Beloff, came to England in the aftermath of the 1917 Revolution and established himself in business, amassing a respectable fortune. Max inherited a full measure of parental drive and energy.

He attended St Paul's School, for which he retained a special affection. His election to a history scholarship at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, was followed by the Gibbs scholarship in 1934 and a First in the Modern History School. In 1935 he was elected to a senior despatch at Magdalen and in 1937 to a junior research fellowship at Corpus.

The fruit of these early years at Oxford was *Public Order and Popular Disturbances 1660-1777* (1938), in which he looked at the incidence of economic and religious agitation between the reigns of Charles II and Anne. Based upon a Blitt thesis, it was a thoroughly scholarly affair, and was followed by his appointment as assistant history lecturer at Manchester University, where he stayed until 1940 when he was called up. Ill-health, however, cut short his service in the Royal Corps of Signals. He returned to Manchester until Oxford called him back in 1946 as the Nuffield Reader in Comparative Institutions.

Thus began a long association with the then infant Nuffield College, where Beloff became a Fellow in 1947. His academic interests had by this time moved from the 17th century to later periods and to foreign fields. For Chatham House he undertook two solid and careful studies of Soviet foreign policy, a field for which his background and linguistic attainments particularly fitted him. These studies were published in two volumes as *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia* (1947 and 1949), and were followed by *Soviet Policy in the Far East* (1953).

He developed a parallel interest in the United States and American history, producing in 1948 the first serious study of Thomas Jefferson to appear in England: *Thomas Jefferson and American Democracy*. An edition that year of *The Federalist* (the 18th-century papers written to bring about ratification of the American Constitution) carried a long, expository introduction by Beloff. A later volume in the Home University Library, *American Federal Government* (1953), was a sound incisive outline of the American political system.

For all his interest in the United States, the focus of Beloff's concern and attachments remained in the older world, not least its place in the new order. On assuming the Gladstone Chair of Government and Public Administration at Oxford in 1957, he proposed for himself a



A sparkling and highly confrontational brain: Max Beloff in 1973

programme of study involving the impact upon British and imperial institutions of Britain's postwar association with Europe and the Atlantic alliance.

This was a natural development of his growing interest in problems of foreign policy, reflected in his *Albert Shaw Lectures*, delivered at Johns Hopkins University in 1954 and published as *Foreign Policy and the Democratic Process* (1955). A brief volume on *Europe and the Europeans* (1957) was a by-product of work done by Beloff as rapporteur general to a Council of Europe study group on the foundations of European unity in 1956.

His ideas on this subject were developed in *New Dimensions in Foreign Policy* (1961) in which, with regard to

Britain's relationship with the European Economic Community, he noted that there was "strong scepticism in Britain as to the possibility of tighter forms of integration". This was followed by a more lively and arresting work, *The United States and the Unity of Europe* (1963), in which he argued that America was seeking to prevent a united Europe, fearing its economic and political might.

In 1969 there appeared the first volume of *Imperial Sunset*, which covered the years 1897 to 1921 and traced the process by which Britain began the liquidation of her imperial role. Although the progress of the work's concluding volumes was interrupted by other scholarly and public interests, Beloff found time to compose two other lengthy studies, writing *The*

Government of the United Kingdom (1980, with G.R. Peele) and *Wars and Welfare* (1984) which was a full-scale history of 20th-century Britain.

This large output was the product of a lifetime of unremitting scholarly labour. Oxford has known few more assiduous or professional scholars in the modern field than Beloff. With excellent linguistic equipment, speed in assimilation and fluency in exposition, he was also extremely competent in the organisation of his material. Except when his polemical interests were aroused, it could be argued that his work lacked something of flavour: the writing, though always lucid, was not always elegant or evocative. His virtues were those of accuracy, comprehensiveness and good sense.

Beloff's initial professional assiduity and rigour did not make him indifferent to issues of party politics. Indeed, from his early days as a member of the Oxford Union he was a keen controversialist. He was Editor of the *Oxford Magazine* for a year in the 1950s, and there were few educational debates in Oxford or the country at large which failed to draw his fire. When the Oxford Union put up the motion "This house would not fight for King and Country" in 1933, he was teller for the ayes, though when the debate was replayed fifty years later, Beloff "admitted his youthful pacifism and adopted the contrary stance".

In party politics, he was an active member of the Liberal Party and served for many years as president of the South Oxfordshire Liberal Association. He resigned in 1972 over education policy, complaining that the younger elements within the party were preaching "anarchism and socialism", and started his move towards the Conservatives. Education was always central to his interests, because, in his view, it was central to society. His inaugural lecture as Gladstone Professor, delivered on February 20, 1958, had as its subject *The Tasks of Government*; much of it, however, was given over to a detailed criticism of the Oxford Honour School of Modern Greats or PPE, which combined politics, philosophy, and economics.

That concern with the practicalities of education was to bear remarkable fruit some two decades later. Prompted by a belief that educational standards were falling and that the autonomy of the universities was being eroded, Beloff became associated with the attempt to establish a private university in the United Kingdom. When sufficient money was raised to enable the experiment to proceed, Beloff decided to retire early from Oxford and to devote his time to the new University College at Buckingham.

As Principal from 1974 to 1979 he threw himself tirelessly into its affairs and was rewarded when in 1983 the college was awarded a Royal Charter, thus becoming a full university able to award degrees. It is doubtful whether anyone else would so

readily have made the personal sacrifice involved in leaving academic life in Oxford, and it is unlikely that the experiment would have succeeded without him.

When Beloff retired from Buckingham in 1979 he had expected to resume full-time academic study. But he was knighted in 1980 and created a life peer the following year, which caused him to take on a new set of public obligations. For the Conservative Party he undertook a substantial amount of public speaking and was, prior to the 1983 general election, active in the party's research and policy process. The House of Lords fascinated him and he contributed frequently to its deliberations, not least in the recent question of the abolition of hereditary peers, of which he was a stern opponent.

He remained a prolific writer, as at home with the rough and tumble of daily journalism as with the rigours of academic study. He was an incisive political columnist, not least in *The Times*, and in the years of what should have been his retirement he enjoyed a journalistic Indian summer as a polemical defender of traditional British liberties. In 1990 he lambasted the Conservative Government for its decision to introduce student loans, a move he believed to be as philistine as it was unheroic. Though he had once been in favour of the Common Market, he became an outspoken detractor of the federalist project of European Union, a theme which he expanded on in his book of 1996, *Britain and the European Union: Dialogue of the Deaf*. And only last month, he stoked considerable controversy with an article in *The Times* in which he compared Tony Blair's rise to power to that of Hitler.

A rather aloof man, he was never able to participate easily in conversations without serious intellectual content, and could strike those who came in contact with him as impatient and forbidding. He was, however, enormously generous with his time to students and fellow scholars. He was an honorary LLD of Pittsburgh; an honorary DCL of Bishop's University in Canada; an honorary D Litt of Bowdoin College, United States; and held an Honorary Doctorate from Aix-Marseille. He was awarded a D Litt by Oxford and in 1973 was elected a Fellow of the British Academy.

In his intellectual autobiography *An Historian in the Twentieth Century* (1992) Max Beloff mourned this century and its flight from reason, scorning the ascendancy of political correctness and lamenting the premature dismemberment of the British Empire. It encapsulated much of his later thought. His many admirers regretted only that there was not more of the man in the book.

He married Helen Dobrin in 1938 and is survived by his wife and two sons.

LORD ST OSWALD

Lord St Oswald, 5th Baron, died on March 18 aged 79. He was born on July 19, 1919.

INHERITING his title and the contents of Nostell Priory, near Wakefield, on his brother's death in 1984, Derek Winn found himself faced with the problems which are so often germane to the stewardship of a stately home. Nostell Priory, commissioned by an ancestor, Sir Rowland Winn, 4th Baronet, in 1733 and created over a period of fifty years to 1785 by the architects James Paine and Robert Adam, had passed to the National Trust in 1953,

though the family continued to live there. Its contents, which include a remarkable collection of Chippendale furniture, remained in the ownership of the family.

The 4th Lord St Oswald's death faced his successor with tax liabilities of around £4 million. The spectre of the breaking up of the finest documented collection of Chippendale furniture in the world loomed large. If broken up and offered in salerooms, the Chippendale contents of Nostell Priory would have fetched somewhere between £20 million and £40 million, a tempting sum. "I kept thinking of all the

things it would buy," said Lady St Oswald at the time. "But my husband was determined to keep the collection together."

In the event a solution was found whereby the collection remained intact — and remained at Nostell Priory — and enough money was raised to cover the family's outstanding liabilities and found a new charitable trust to be devoted to the maintenance of the priory and its 2,700 acres of parkland. The National Heritage Memorial Fund purchased the Chippendale collection and some paintings for £6.1 million, leaving £2 mil-

lion to prime the charitable trust. The money came from a special grant of £25 million made at that time to the National Heritage Fund by the Department of the Environment to secure the future of Nostell Priory and two other threatened country houses: Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire, and Weston Park, Staffordshire.

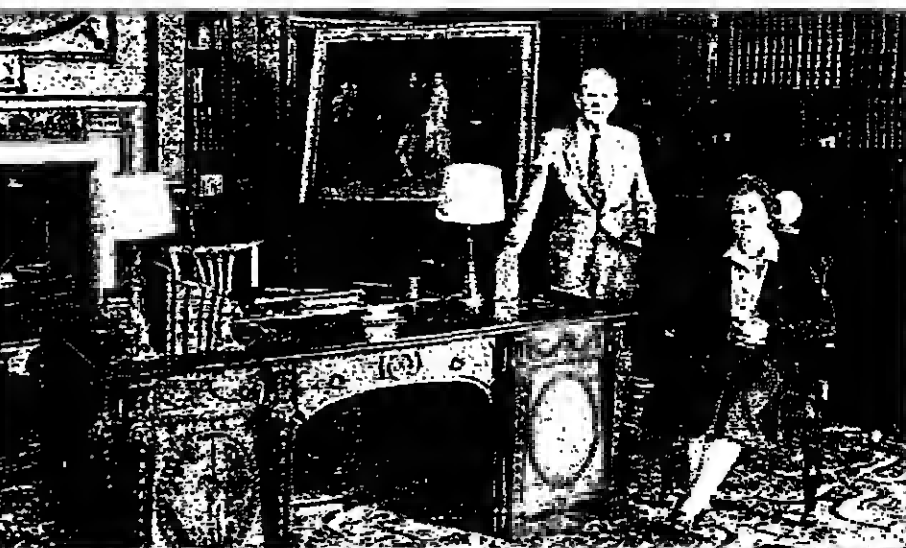
This was not the last time there was a threat to one of Nostell's valuable collections. In 1994 Lord St Oswald was faced with an admittedly much lesser bill of £79,093 inheritance tax on the estate of his late brother. On that

occasion a collection of 18th-century architectural drawings, the originals made by Paine and Adam for their creation of Nostell Priory, was accepted in lieu of payment by the Inland Revenue. The drawings remained at Nostell Priory.

Derek Edward Anthony Winn was the second son of the 3rd Lord St Oswald. He was educated at Stowe School from where he was commissioned into the King's Royal Rifle Corps (60th Rifles) in 1938. In 1942 he transferred to The Parachute Regiment and served in the Middle East and North Africa, where he was wounded. He spent the remainder of the war as ADC to the Governor-General of New Zealand. After the war he served for the three years 1948 to 1951 in the Malayan Police.

In the 1950s he went into film production, among other things acquiring the television rights to the *Malgrove* books. Sold on, these subsequently made it to the small screen as a popular BBC television series. After quitting production Winn farmed for some years in Sussex before returning via a sojourn in London to Yorkshire, where he became more and more involved with his brother in administering the St Oswald lands.

On his brother's death he and his wife, Denise, whom he had married in 1954, threw themselves into the restoration of Nostell Priory, which had become somewhat dilapidated under the 4th Lord St Oswald.



Lord and Lady St Oswald amid the Chippendale furnishings of Nostell Priory, 1986

A large and meticulously crafted doll's house at Nostell, thought to be the work of the young Thomas Chippendale. The event raised £11,000 for the National Trust and £5,000 for asthma research.

A vivacious woman and energetic helpmeet, Lady St Oswald was knowledgeable about Nostell Priory's Chippendale heritage. "We've got fancy, we've got plain, we've got early, we've got late. We must be the only house in England with a Chippendale chopping block," she once enthused to an interviewer, at the same time producing the ten shilling receipt for the purchase.

Lord St Oswald was presi-

dent of the Wakefield Parachute Regiment Association from 1985. With other former paratrooper officers he founded the committee to free Private Lee Clegg, jailed in 1993 for the murder in 1990 of an Ulster teenager at an army checkpoint.

The committee launched its campaign at Nostell Priory in January 1995. Clegg was cleared of murder on appeal earlier this month.

Lord St Oswald was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of West Yorkshire in 1987. He is survived by his wife, Denise, and by a son and a daughter. His son, the Hon Charles Rowland Andrew Winn, succeeds him.

PERSONAL COLUMN

DEATHS

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MEMORIAL SERVICES

BOYLE — Michael, A Mass of Thanksgiving will be offered for Michael Boyle on Saturday April 17th at 11 am at Our Lady of Lourdes, Weymouth Road, Haslemere, Surrey.

IN MEMORIAM

MORRIS — William, Poet, artist, socialist. Born 185 years ago this day. Drink a glass to the memory! KB, MW.

WANTED

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TICKETS FOR SALE

ACCESS TICKETS World War II. Starting Sunday, The War Museum & Pop Concerts 0171 821 0216 All Areas.

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FLIGHTS DIRECTORY

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FLIGHTSEEKERS

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FARESAVERS

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UK HOLIDAYS

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NANNIES & DOMESTIC

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Swallow deal collapses at eleventh hour

By DOMINIC WALSH

SWALLOW GROUP, the northeast hotel and pub operator, was in disarray last night after the last-minute collapse of a management buyout of its two breweries and a package of 350 tenanted pubs.

The estimated £65 million deal was to have ushered a new dawn for the group, formerly known as Vaux, as it sought to put behind it a lacklustre recent performance to focus on its higher growth Swallow Hotels chain and managed pubs.

The collapse of the deal centred on the terms of future drinks supply agreements between the two parties. Peter Catesby, chief executive, said that the MBO team, backed by Alchemy Partners, had insisted on a five-year distribution tie. "We couldn't tie ourselves for more than two years," he said.

Swallow is understood to believe that, under Alchemy's terms, the deal would have been worth £14 million less than under its own proposals. But Sir Paul Nicholson, Swallow's chairman, disagreed with the rest of his board, saying it was "not a difference to justify putting 700 people out of work."

The company is now expected to offer some 250 of the pubs to the likes of Mansfield Brewery and Pubmaster, resulting in the closure of the breweries. Ironically, this was the option favoured by Martin Grant, the former chief executive, and Neal Gossage, finance director, who were both dismissed last month after secretly telling institutional investors of their disagreement with the board's decision to give the MBO team a four-week period of exclusivity.

Sir Paul yesterday vowed to try to persuade the board to accept the MBO team's offer. Eric Walters, a partner at Alchemy, said: "We are still interested."

RBS makes £140m profit as investor services go to US

By CAROLINE MERRELL
BANKING CORRESPONDENT

ROYAL BANK of Scotland is selling its investor services subsidiaries to Bank of New York in a deal that values the businesses at about £500 million.

The sale will give rise to a £140 million profit for Royal Bank. Under the terms of the transaction, Bank of New York will buy the whole of RBS Trust Bank, and 30 per cent of the bank's offshore equivalent, Bank of New York

is to pay £29 million for the stake in the offshore company, Royal Bank of Scotland International Security Services Holdings.

Mercury Asset Management will also benefit from the deal because it owns 30 per cent of the RBS Trust Bank.

A Royal Bank spokesman said that it had sold because investor services were no longer deemed central to its strategy. Bank of New York specialises in offering investor services and recently bought the cus-

tom business of Coutts and JP Morgan. It is now the world's largest custodian, with \$5.9 trillion (£3.64 trillion) of assets administered worldwide.

Bank of New York is paying in a mixture of cash and loan notes to be agreed between the parties. Royal Bank said that £200 million of the payment would be deferred, and be payable in three equal instalments from 2000. Further payment may be due in 2000 and 2001 under an earn-out agreement.

Both parties refused to comment on the nature of the agreement, but a Royal Bank spokesman said that payment would be related to the fee income generated by RBS Trust Bank, Mercury, Legal & General and Woolwich all use its services.

Sir George Mathewson, Royal Bank's chief executive, said: "Following a strategic review, we concluded that Trust Bank would be better positioned as a subsidiary of a bank for whom the provision of administration services to

investors, issuers and intermediaries is a core business."

The transaction will also strengthen Royal Bank's balance sheet, adding 0.3 per cent to its tier one capital ratio and 0.4 per cent to total capital ratios.

Bank of New York said it planned to keep Trust Bank's 1,300 staff. Trust Bank was established in 1997 when Royal Bank bought the custody and investor services division and related treasury and banking business of SG Warburg.



Goeran Lindahl, chairman of ABB Alstom Power, left, shakes hands with Pierre Bilger, centre, and Claude Darmon

ABB-Alstom power deal

By CARL MORTISHED, INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS EDITOR

ASEA, Brown Boveri and Alstom have seized the baton of world leadership in power generation from America's General Electric by combining their respective turbine businesses into a joint venture with sales of €9.9 billion (£6.6 billion).

ABB, the Swiss/Swedish engineering group and France's Alstom yesterday agreed to create a 50/50 joint company, ABB Alstom Power. It will include the Alstom energy businesses with the exception of its heavy-duty gas turbine which

is being sold to GE for \$910 million (£562 million). ABB will inject all of its power generation units into the joint venture save the nuclear activities and service-related businesses.

The transaction will include a cash payment by Alstom to ABB of £1.4 billion to account for the larger contribution of ABB to the venture. Alstom said that improvements in efficiency and productivity as well as economies of scale would yield about £400 million in savings within three to four years.

The deal propels Alstom and its partner into the top position in an industry known for cutthroat competition. Alstom shares gained 7 per cent as the market greeted the news that the company's weakness had been turned into a potential strength.

Alstom was relegated to fifth place in the power league when Siemens took over the power generation arm of Westinghouse last year for DM1.2 billion. The new company will boast almost €10 billion in

sales, well ahead of GE, even after its purchase of the Alstom heavy-duty gas turbine operation. Pierre Bilger, Alstom's chairman, said: "The joint company will be a strong R&D powerhouse." Pro-forma joint R&D spend for the venture will be €630 million.

The new company will be led by Claude Darmon, deputy chief executive of Alstom. Analysts yesterday speculated that the deal may be a prelude to a complete exit from power generation by ABB.

IPE enters talks that could halt merger

By CARL MORTISHED

THE International Petroleum Exchange is in talks with a group of energy companies over a £25 million investment in the exchange that could scupper the current merger talks with its New York rival, Nymex.

The IPE would not identify the potential investors but described them as "large and well-respected companies involved in the European energy business". The investors are likely to include power generators and other electricity companies, keen to see IPE develop a futures market in electricity. The IPE confirmed that the investors were not currently members of the exchange which excludes leading oil companies, such as Shell and BP.

Lynton Jones, chief executive of IPE, said that some members wanted the organisation to remain independent and pursue alternatives to an outright sale to Nymex. The investment proposal would entail the sale of up to 70 per cent of IPE to several energy companies with no single investor taking more than 15 per cent.

He explained that the IPE was undercapitalised because of its status as a mutual.

A board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday next week to consider the deal and the current talks with Nymex.

Opec ministers sign deal in record time

OIL prices held steady at about \$13.74 per barrel of benchmark Brent crude after the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries ratified in record time an agreement to take two million barrels of oil a day off the market for the next year. Ministers meeting in Vienna yesterday took less than half an hour to sign the deal reached informally in The Hague earlier this month. The final communiqué issued after the meeting said: "Member countries strongly emphasised their firm commitment to this agreement... and stressed their intention to ensure full compliance."

Opec agreed two rounds of cuts totalling some three million barrels a day last year, but they were not fully implemented and failed to boost prices from historic low levels, causing severe economic problems to oil-dependent economies. Yesterday's communiqué said that Opec and non-Opec oil producers had agreed to cut output by 2.1 million barrels per day for a year from April 1, with cuts of slightly more than 1.7 million barrels a day coming from ten Opec members. Four non-OPEC countries — Russia, Mexico, Oman and Norway — will cut exports by 400,000 barrels a day between them.

LVMH confirms bid

LVMH yesterday confirmed its bid for 100 per cent of Gucci, after an enabling decision by the Amsterdam Court of Appeal. LVMH said it had notified the Gucci board of its decision and wished to enter "as soon as possible" into negotiations. LVMH did not reveal the value of its bid, in line with Dutch merger regulations which provide for a seven-day delay between formal notification of an offer and official announcement of the price. On Monday the Amsterdam court ordered Gucci to enter into negotiations with LVMH.

Stakeholder concerns

STAKEHOLDER pensions, the centrepiece of the Government's aim to reform retirement savings, are in danger of missing their target a new report has found. More than two thirds of people earning between £9,000 and £18,500 do not have a stake plan, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. The IFS argues such people should rely on the state second pension, which the Government hopes will replace Serps, or by contributing to an individual savings account (ISA), to be launched next month.

Yahoo! link for HMV

HMV, the British music retailer, has tackled the threat from Internet stores such as Amazon.com head-on by launching a free Internet service in partnership with Yahoo!, the web directory. The company will distribute free CD-Roms throughout its 107 British stores which, when installed in a personal computer, will provide free Internet access, free e-mail, and a direct link to HMV's online music store. The online store will sell heavily discounted CDs, such as Blur's 13 for £9.99.

IMI in £16m disposal

IMI, the engineering group, has agreed to sell the aerospace businesses of IMI Marston, a subsidiary, to Hamilton Standard, a subsidiary of America's United Technologies Corporation, for £16.6 million. The businesses are based at Fordhouses, near Wolverhampton, and employ nearly 260 people in the manufacture of heat exchangers, tubes, couplings and manifolds for the aerospace industry. In 1998 the businesses earned operating profits of £1.7 million on sales of £19 million. IMI shares fell 24p to 270p yesterday.

Phytopharm royalties

PHYTOPHARM, the company seeking to develop medicines from plants, has increased the level of royalties that it hopes to receive from its potential osteoarthritis drug. This is the result of Phytopharm agreeing to take on development costs that were to be borne by Phytochem, its cash-strapped Indonesian partner. Preliminary results from a phase II trial of P54 in about 190 osteoarthritis patients are expected to be published next month. Phytopharm is also testing P54 as an anti-cancer agent.

Croda to shut smaller plants

By PAUL DURMAN

CRODA International, the chemicals company, is planning to close several of its smaller plants in an effort to save £4 million a year.

Weak demand in the UK and the strength of sterling reduced Croda's pre-tax profits last year from £41.1 million to £32 million — even before an £18 million exceptional loss on three disposals.

The sale of a paints business, an own-label soap company and an adhesives firm has increased the group's focus on oil-based chemicals used in personal care, pharmaceutical and nutrition products and industrial chemicals

used in paints, inks and packaging.

Barbara Richmond, finance director, would not say how many of Croda's 1,200 UK employees would lose their jobs. She said Croda regards about half of its 15 manufacturing plants as small. The smaller industrial chemicals division suffered most last year, with profits falling 28 per cent to £9 million on slightly lower sales of £19.2 million.

A second interim dividend of 6.8p maintains the total payment at 10.35p.

Tyson helps lift Hay & Robertson

By CHRIS AYRES

MIKE TYSON and Liam Gallagher helped profits to rise 34 per cent to £23 million last year at Hay & Robertson, owner of the Kangol clothing brand favoured by the boxer and Oasis singer.

The company, which is run by Lance Yates — an adviser to the Rolling Stones on merchandising — also owns the rights to the Admiral and England/Three Lions clothing brands. Yesterday, H&R reported a 13 per cent rise in full-year sales to £20.6 million, and a 39 per cent rise in earnings per share to 7.8p. A final dividend of 0.5p, up 66 per cent, will be paid on May 21.

During the year H&R gained product endorsements from big-name footballers such as David Ginola and David Seaman. However, Mr Yates said that the company was eager to distance itself from the troubled replica football shirts market, and instead emphasise its focus on branded leisurewear. Shares in H&R fell 4p to 101.5p yesterday.

Tempus, page 28

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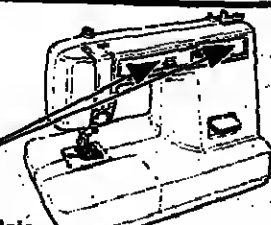
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Bridgeman opens up a can of beans



COMMENTARY
by our City Editor

Britain's supermarket operators are steeling for the worst. By the end of this week, they will have received official confirmation that the Office of Fair Trading is to subject their activities to the full scrutiny of a Monopolies Commission inquiry. The tedium of a protracted investigation is depressing enough for the grocers but what they really fear is that the result might be an attempt to weight the odds unfairly against the current winners.

Their suspicion is that, somewhere in Government, an idea is already being formulated to try to alter the planning process so that there would be positive discrimination against those stores that currently dominate the market. It would be a hugely controversial move but it would answer the question that is now beginning to trouble some people at the Treasury: "Having said that British consumers are being forced to pay too much for their groceries, what are we going to do about it?"

A Monopolies Commission inquiry provides a convenient breathing space. The OFT's John Bridgeman is, of course, its own man but his decision to take a closer look at the grocers coincided with the consumers' friend, Gordon Brown, voicing his concerns over shop prices. Whatever the results of the OFT's protracted investigations, a clean bill of health for the industry was not likely to have gone down well at

Number 11. But what is to happen when the inquiry ends? The MMC may find that supplier discounts are not being passed on to consumers, but who is to determine the true cost of selling a can of baked beans? New Labour will surely not want to venture into a system where profit margins are dictated: that would hardly go down well with all those who have Tesco shares tucked into their Peps and pension funds.

No, this new Labour Government has trumpeted the merits of competition to bring down prices and increase productivity. What it would like to see is a bit more competition for grocery sales. Within the M25, 80 per cent of superstores belong to Tesco or Sainsbury. Where are the Wal-marts or French hypermarkets that would drive prices down?

When Gordon Brown asked McKinsey to take a look at the industry, the consultants were rather enthusiastic about the skills of British grocers but berated the regulatory system, and planning in particular, as the cause of high prices. The Treasury has, apparently, been pondering on this and come up with the idea that, when judging planning applica-

tions, local authorities would be asked to bear in mind consumer choice. This might be interpreted as planners being asked to take a more generous view of applications coming from grocers other than Tesco or Sainsbury. The Department of the Environment has not yet embraced this attempt to distort the free market but there is time. And remember, something has to happen or consumers will feel let down.

Still a recession for manufacturers

The Chancellor's desire to be seen in the best light explains his somewhat inconsistent approach to accounting. For the purposes of his recent Budget, tax relief that he took away from us did not feature in the tax account, but tax credits that he did dole out were very much to be included in the sums. He took the advice of the

government statisticians on the latter choice but not the former. The result of this pick and mix approach was a somewhat flattering view of the impact of his Budget tax changes. It meant that he was able to pose for post-speech photographs with the glow of a man who has just generously dispensed £4.5 billion to the people instead of showing the mean features of a Chancellor who could barely bring himself to let go of £250 million. Here is a man who understands what candlelight can do for a complexion.

But his advisers should have warned him that cosmetics and candlelight confer only transitory benefits. The misleading treatment of Miras which has now been unmasked is only the latest deception to emerge from a Budget speech which had enough sins of omission to bore a connoisseur of government. When the Monetary Policy Committee meets next month, the pressure for a cut will be strong. The manufactur-

ers are increasingly of the view that the country may escape the worst of recession, the soft landing is not yet assured. The figures for the last quarter of last year that emerged earlier this week showed a gloomier picture than most economists had expected, with negligible growth during those months. Whatever the City optimists say, there are many manufacturers who contend that if it feels like a recession, as it does to them, then that is what it is.

They would forgive the Chancellor for robbing them of their Miras and married couple's allowance if the Bank of England could provide them with another cut in interest rates. That looks increasingly likely, after yesterday's news that inflation is at its lowest since the Bank gained its independence of government. When the Monetary Policy Committee meets next month, the pressure for a cut will be strong. The manufactur-

ers would like a half a point straight away but the MPC could feel that a quarter now with the option of another later would be more appropriate.

They will be as cautious as the Chancellor was with his Budget. But he has another two Budgets before the next election.

Sterling floats idea for a shake-up

Lord Sterling of Plaistow was in ebullient mood as he unveiled his plans to relaunch the good ship P&O as a glamorous, focused business. When the reshaped company heads for a quote on the New York Stock Exchange, as it surely will, its luxury cruise business should guarantee an enthusiastic following among Bermuda-clad investors.

But the restructuring of the business is not Lord Sterling's only project. He would like to resurrect the British shipping industry, which means persuading the Government to introduce a less hostile tax regime.

This ace lobbyist knows his way around Whitehall as was apparent with the Budget day revelation that the Treasury was

mindful to take up his suggestion of a tonnage tax. The committee that has been set up to investigate the possible implications is not likely to be the usual long-winded stalling exercise: it consists of just one man, Lord Alexander of Weedon.

No doubt the lawyer-turned banker is now approaching the shipping industry with a totally open mind but Lord Sterling is optimistic that before very long he may be able to sail his liners back to British bases, under the British flag. The Deputy Prime Minister, former ships steward John Prescott, is enthusiastic.

Whether the dawn of a new tonnage tax will be celebrated in duty free champagne depends on the outcome of a debate in Berlin this weekend. Lord S has not given up hope on this one either.

Silverman lining

AMERICAN business pays by results. So Henry Silverman, boss of (des)Cendant, had his 1998 bonus cut by half when the group was knocked sideways by a \$500 million accounting fraud in the company he merged with. This left a salary plus bonus of only \$2.8 million. Fortunately, rebasing his share options after the troubles allowed him to make a fast buck that our own fat cats could scarcely dream of. Clearly not payment by results: more a prize for not being a fraudster. Rarely has honesty paid so well.

Customers enthusiastic over Iceland GM stance

By ROBERT COLE, CITY CORRESPONDENT

ICELAND, the frozen food retailer, is reaping big rewards from its determined stance against genetically modified food, according to Malcolm Walker, the chairman and chief executive.

Mr Walker said that he believes thousands of new customers are shopping at Iceland because of the company's policy of minimising the amount of GM foodstuffs sold in its shops.

At yesterday's presentation of the company's annual results, it displayed some of what it claims to be hundreds of letters from customers applauding the policy. One correspondent, Anna Turnbull Walker of Hythe, Kent, wrote: "Although I am a traditional Sainsbury's/Tesco shopper I have recently started using Iceland because of your splendid attitude towards GM food."

Helped by such consumer enthusiasm, Iceland reported 10 per cent increases in both sales and underlying profits for the year to January 2. The group said that an expanding home delivery initiative fuelled the rise.

In the 11 weeks of the new year, sales grew by 10 per cent, Iceland said. This advance is some way ahead of the growth generated by supermarket rivals, although sales in the com-

parable period of 1998 sales grew 16 per cent.

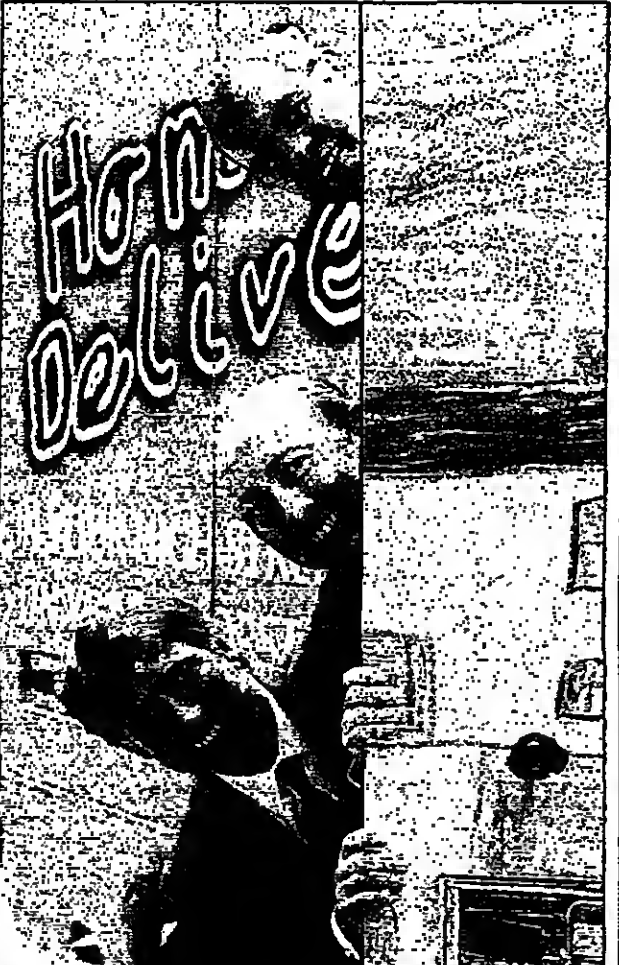
The company said that the home delivery service had begun in time for the start of 1998, and that the initial rise in sales activity had slowed by the first quarter of 1999.

Mr Walker said that sales picked up markedly towards the end of the current-year trading period. He attributed the improvement to the airing of new advertisements.

The home delivery service is available nationally and is, currently free. However, Mr Walker said it was given a trial to the levy of a £1 delivery charge.

The average value of spending per Iceland customer has risen from £6 to £9 over the past two years. The group said that the much larger average size of shopping bill for goods delivered to homes accounts for much of the increase. The average shopping bill for home-delivered orders is £42.

Iceland's annual pre-tax profits rose 27 per cent to £55 million, up from £43.5 million. However, the figures were flattered by the absence of £7 million of exceptional items which depressed previous year profits. The final dividend is 4p making a total for the year of 5.8p, 7.4 per cent up on last time.



Malcolm Walker, bottom, with Andrew Pritchard and Russell Ford

ITC blocks BskyB's appeal

THE Independent Television Commission yesterday blocked attempts by BskyB to force the ITV companies to make their new channel, ITV2, available on digital satellite (Raymond Snoddy writes).

BskyB, in which News International, owner of The Times, has a 40 per cent stake, appealed to the ITC that ITV's failure to supply ITV2 was anti-competitive.

The Commission, however, decided that there were no grounds for forcing the ITV companies to make the channel available. The two largest ITV companies, Granada and Carlton, own ONDigital, the main commercial digital terrestrial service.

Granada buys 18.6% of SMG

By RAYMOND SNODDY, MEDIA EDITOR

GRANADA GROUP yesterday put down a marker for an eventual takeover of Scottish Media Group by buying 18.6 per cent of the company from Mirror Group for £10.3 million.

Although Granada said it had "no present intention" of making an offer for the whole of SMG unless someone else makes a bid or builds a stake of 15 per cent or more, the deal follows a familiar pattern.

In the case of both London Weekend and Yorkshire-Tyne Tees Television, Granada first built up stakes before later moving to buy the companies outright. If it were to take out SMG - which has the ITV licences north of the border - Granada would, with the exception of tiny Border TV, con-

trol all the ITV franchises from John O'Grady's down to the Highlands.

The deal shuts out Carlton Communications, which was also interested in the Mirror stake, from Scotland. It is believed that CanWest, the Canadian international broadcaster, and CLT-Ufa, the Berlmann-owned broadcaster, were also interested.

Mirror says it sold the SMG stake to concentrate on its newspaper interests. The 915p share deal represented an 8.5 per cent premium to SMG's closing price on Monday and a £47 million profit on the purchase of SMG's shares in 1994 and 1995.

Approach lifts Jarvis shares

SHARES in Jarvis Hotels jumped 26p to 158p yesterday after the group announced receiving a "highly tentative" bid approach (Dominic Walsh writes).

There was instant speculation that Jarvis was seeking to take itself private, but analysts said that the wording of its statement suggested an outside approach from the likes of Accor or France or Starwood Hotels of the US.

Jarvis, which has 63 hotels, floated at 175p in 1996, but investors' coolness to three-star hotels depressed its shares. Analysts said a 160p offer, valuing Jarvis at £280 million, would be enough to clinch a deal.

Tempus, page 28

ROBECCO GROUP

ROBECCO N.V.
(investment company with a variable capital)
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF SHAREHOLDERS
to be held on Thursday, 22nd April, 1999, at Concert and Congress centre "de Doelen", entrance Schoorburgplein 50, Rotterdam, at 09.30 hours.

AGENDA

1. Opening
2. Report of the Management Board for the financial year 1998
3. Consideration and confirmation of the Annual Accounts for the financial year 1998
4. Consideration and confirmation of the profit appropriation
5. To discharge the Management Board and the Supervisory Board
6. Composition of the Supervisory Board
7. Any other business

ROLINCO N.V.
(investment company with a variable capital)
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF SHAREHOLDERS
to be held on Thursday, 22nd April, 1999, at Concert and Congress centre "de Doelen", entrance Schoorburgplein 50, Rotterdam, at 11.45 hours.

AGENDA

1. Opening
2. Report of the Management Board for the financial year 1998
3. Consideration and confirmation of the Annual Accounts for the financial year 1998
4. Consideration and confirmation of the profit appropriation
5. To discharge the Management Board and the Supervisory Board
6. Composition of the Supervisory Board
7. Any other business

RORENTO N.V.
(registered in Philipsburg, St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles)
INFORMATIVE MEETING FOR SHAREHOLDERS
to be held on Thursday, 22nd April, 1999, at Concert and Congress centre "de Doelen", entrance Schoorburgplein 50, Rotterdam, at 14.30 hours.

AGENDA

1. Opening
2. To discuss the Report of the Management Board for the financial year 1998
3. To discuss the Annual Accounts for the financial year 1998
4. To discuss the profit appropriation
5. To discuss the discharge of the Management Board and the Supervisory Board
6. To discuss the composition of the Supervisory Board
7. Any other business

RORENTO N.V.
(registered in Philipsburg, St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles)
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF SHAREHOLDERS
to be held on Monday, 3rd May, 1999, at the offices of Robeco Antilles N.V., Kaya Wilson Papa Goden 24, Willemstad, Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles, at 10.30 hours.

AGENDA

1. Opening
2. Report of the Management Board for the financial year 1998
3. Consideration and confirmation of the Annual Accounts for the financial year 1998
4. Consideration and confirmation of the profit appropriation
5. To discharge the Management Board and the Supervisory Board
6. Composition of the Supervisory Board
7. Any other business

Copies of the full agendas and of the Annual Reports for 1998 can be obtained from National Westminster Bank PLC, NatWest Investments Counter, c/o NatWest Markets, 1st Floor, 135 Bishopsgate, London EC2M 3UR or Robeco U.K. Limited, 43-45 Portman Square, London W1H 0HE. Telephone: 0171-935 4268.

Holders of Bearer Share Certificates desirous of attending or being represented at the Meeting should lodge their Certificates by hand (postal deliveries will not be accepted for voting purposes) with the National Westminster Bank PLC at the address shown above (between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.) in exchange for a receipt, not later than Thursday, 15th April, 1999.

Beneficial owners whose Bearer Share Certificates are presently deposited with a Bank must obtain a Certificate of Deposit signed by the Bank as evidence that such Bank is holding the Share Certificates. The Certificate of Deposit must be lodged against receipt, by that Bank, with the National Westminster Bank PLC, in accordance with the requirements stated above.

The receipt for Bearer Share Certificates or Certificate of Deposit will constitute evidence of a shareholder's entitlement to attend and vote at the Meeting and should be presented at the door of the Meeting Hall. If a holder desires to appoint a proxy, who need not be a member of the Company, to attend and vote in his stead, a form of proxy may be obtained from the National Westminster Bank PLC at the address shown above and this form of proxy must be presented at the door of the Meeting Hall together with the receipt for the Bearer Share Certificates or Certificate of Deposit.

Beneficial owners of Sub-shares Certificates registered in the name of National Provincial Bank (Nominees) Limited desirous of attending or being represented at the Meeting must obtain a receipt or Certificate of Deposit in the same way as holders of Bearer Share Certificates. If they desire to attend the Meeting in person or to be represented they must obtain a form of proxy signed by National Provincial Bank (Nominees) Limited, which form must be presented at the door of the Meeting Hall together with the receipt exchanged for the Sub-shares Certificates or Certificate of Deposit.

Beneficial owners of Sub-shares registered in any name other than that of National Provincial Bank (Nominees) Limited, holders of Registered Full Shares and Shareholders who maintain a Shareholder's Account with the Company wishing to attend and vote at the Meeting or to appoint a proxy to attend and vote in their stead, must signify their intention in writing to the Secretary of Robeco N.V. or Rolinco N.V. (whichever is applicable), Coolings 120, NL 3011 AG Rotterdam, Netherlands to arrive not later than Thursday, 15th April, 1999.

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Beneficial owners whose Bearer Share Certificates are presently deposited with a Bank must obtain a Certificate of Deposit signed by the Bank as evidence that such Bank is holding the Share Certificates. This Certificate must be lodged against receipt, by that Bank, with the National Westminster Bank PLC, in accordance with the requirements stated above.

The receipt for the Share Certificates or Certificate of Deposit will constitute evidence of a shareholder's entitlement to attend and vote at the Meeting and should be presented at the door of the Meeting Hall. If a holder desires to appoint a proxy, who need not be a member of the Company, to attend and vote in his stead, a form of proxy may be obtained from the National Westminster Bank PLC at the address shown above and this form of proxy must be presented at the door of the Meeting Hall together with the receipt for the Share Certificates or Certificate of Deposit.

Shareholders who maintain a Shareholder's Account with the Company, wishing to attend either or both Meetings or to appoint a proxy in their stead, must signify their intention in writing to the Secretary, Rorento N.V. c/o Avirento B.V., Coolings 120, NL 3011 AG Rotterdam, Netherlands to arrive not later than the dates indicated above.

Although proxies may attend, votes will not be cast at the Informative Meeting.

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Although proxies may attend, votes will not be cast at the Informative Meeting.

BY ORDER OF THE MANAGEMENT
ROTTERDAM
Dated this 24th day of March, 1999.

BY ORDER OF THE MANAGEMENT
PHILIPSBURG
Dated this 24th day of March, 1999.

Why it's .e not to [change]

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Cautious debut for Morse Holdings

By CHRIS AYKES

SHARES of Morse Holding, the computer reseller and services company, made their stock market debut at 250p yesterday, the very bottom of the suggested pricing range, while its venture capitalist backers significantly scaled back the number of shares offered to the market.

The uncertain debut reflects growing unease in the City about the prospects of the increasingly volatile information technology sector. Many analysts predict a correction later this year caused by blue chip companies delaying IT projects until after the millennium. However, Morse yesterday insisted that "most of our customers have rising budgets".

There are also worries that a recent slowdown in the US computer industry will eventually hit resellers such as Morse and downmarket rivals Computacenter and Compel.

Morse's shares suffered a disappointing first day of trading, rising only 2p to 152p. This valued the shares at 23 times historic earnings - low for the IT sector overall, but relatively high for a computer reseller. The stake held by Duncan McIntyre, Morse's chief executive, is valued at £30.5 million.

Venture capitalist shareholders in Morse include 3i and PPM Ventures, which offered 58 million of their shares to the market, instead of the planned 88 million. However, Morse still managed to raise about £60 million from new shares. Mr McIntyre reduced his personal stake in Morse from 10 per cent to 7.2 per cent.

MICHAEL CLARK

Speculative support lifted Capital Corporation 5p to 66½p with the supporters claiming that the London casino operator, may soon find itself on the receiving end of yet another bid approach. The group has already rejected an offer from rival London Clubs, down 2p to 167p, and recently announced it had also rejected other approaches. Almost two million shares

Credit Lyonnais Securities, the broker, says the sector has been oversold and is urging clients to take advantage of recent weakness.

Angela Whelan, who follows the water companies for Credit Lyonnais, says they are undervalued and that worries about price cuts have been overdone by the City.

Anglia Water is also seen as worthy of mention with the price adding 5p to 745p, down 10p from its 1990 high. Whelan to trim her profit forecasts for the current year and 2000.

There have been worries about Anglia's level of profitability, but the dividend remains covered despite fears that it may have to be cut.

□ **NEW YORK:** US shares were sharply lower as worries about corporate profits wallowed Wall Street. At midday the Dow Jones industrial average was down 143.75 points to 9,746.76.

Autologic.....	342½	+ 12½	+ 3.7
Br Land.....	518	+ 18	+ 3.6

FALLS:

Stock	Close	Chng	Chng%
Capital Inds.....	36¾	- 13½	- 27.0
Easynet.....	369	- 31	- 7.7
Ranper.....	238	- 18½	- 7.2
Shield Diag.....	400	- 30	- 6.9
Pegasus.....	234	- 17½	- 6.9

The dismal year ended with the annual dividend being cut by half.

Hay & Robertson
YOU can put the 34 per cent rise in profits at Hay & Rob-

Kangol's appeal may not last for long, and the company needs to make more well-timed rights purchases to sustain future growth.

At 101½p, down 4p yesterday on some profit taking, the stock trades on an historic

1

10

1. *Chlorophyll a* and *Chlorophyll b* were determined by the method of Arar and Collins (1971) using a Shimadzu 1010 spectrophotometer. The concentration of chlorophyll was expressed in $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$ of the sample.

Power struggle over EMU has only just begun

The latent problems inherent within the European single currency are already bubbling to the surface

Osaka Lafontaine is simply the first victim of a long-term power struggle that is built in to the structure of economic and monetary union. The Maastricht treaty set up conflicting rights to economic policy formation, with little or no democratic accountability. This flawed structure reflects compromises between national goals underlying the agreement, most significantly the Franco-German bargain.

The French Government wanted monetary union to recover control over monetary policy. After the failure of Mitterrand's socialist experiment of 1981-83, the *franc fort* policy meant tying the franc to the mark, so that French monetary policy was set by the Bundesbank. With policy now formed by the European Central Bank, French sovereignty is removed. Germany wanted a much more thoroughgoing federal union in Europe, including full democratic account-

ability — something that is no part of the French concept. But the limited French agenda was Mitterrand's price for supporting German reunification in 1990.

Losing the mark was the nasty part of the federal Europe project for the German public, so the common currency's prospects had to be detached from unbound "Club Med" governments — Italy, Spain and even France. Fiscal as well as monetary policy was taken even further away from political (ie democratic) control. The ECB is answerable to nobody, and is supposed to set the "one-size-fits-all" monetary policy. The Maastricht treaty and the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) set up rules for all participating countries to obey, the most important being the 3 per cent of GDP government deficit limit for 1997, with further deflation to all in the medium term (read: 2002). Add

"one-size-fits-all" fiscal policy to irrevocable surrender of foreign exchange and monetary flexibility, and all possibilities of economic policy adjustment are excluded. We can sit back and wait for the explosion, given the widely different economic conditions and policy requirements of Germany, France, Italy and Spain. In particular, Germany can expect rising unemployment and Spain rising inflation.

So who really sets eurozone monetary policy? In theory, it is the ECB. But an important aspect of monetary policy is government bond issuance, which remains under the control of individual governments. Likewise, it interacts with foreign exchange rate policy, which is the province of the euro-11 finance ministers. By fixing the dollar/euro rate, for example, they could ensure the imposition on the eurozone of Alan Greenspan's

monetary policy (not such a bad idea, you might think).

In fiscal policy too, there are many fingers in the pie. Suppose growth continues to be disappointing in Germany and, perhaps, Italy. A natural response would be a tax cut. Eurozone unemployment is 11 per cent, compared with 6.2 per cent in Britain and 4.4 per cent

in the US, so a little demand stimulus could safely be tried, given inflation at zero. This was Herr Lafontaine's perfectly reasonable point. But a German (or Italian) Government pursuing such a policy would abandon compliance with the SGP. And the ECB has announced that it would tighten monetary policy in response. But this would deflate France and Spain too, where demand is adequate and the SGP being implemented. The ECB claims a role in German fiscal policy, and this implicitly brings in France and Spain. At no stage are voters directly involved.

When it comes to structural reform, surely not the ECB's province, it nonetheless intervenes, and tends to win the argument with Herr Lafontaine. Essential to achieving a large, durable reduction of the eurozone's tragically high unemployment is, particu-

ly, much greater labour market flexibility, in hiring, firing and wages. But with fiscal and monetary policy a repressive and undemocratic battleground, how likely is it that voters will accept lesser job and wage security? More likely, we will see more ruinous collective wage action, like the recent excessive IG Metall settlement, and governments committed to preserving privileges for existing job holders and even adding new absurdities, like the French 35-hour week. The power struggle instituted by the Maastricht treaty will leave voters with influence only where they are least likely to be rational — and could threaten the liberalising single market reforms, whose guardian is the European Commission.

The confusion of powers in eurozone economic policy invites a prolonged turf war, probably with rising unemployment and an increas-

ingly angry German public. The only logical way forward will be to move toward a democratic federal Europe. But for that the French will have to abandon their control over policy, and the Germans will have to accept Club Med voters having rights over their currency. Just how this will be achieved, given the stagnation, unemployment and power struggles that lie ahead, is hard to see. It is true that separation of powers, the famous "checks and balances", work well in the US. But their system was set up with a clean slate and much more intelligently to start with, and the crucial issue of states' rights was only settled by massive blood-letting in the Civil War. Let us hope that British voters, when and if they are finally consulted, will have the sense to steer clear of what promises to be a nightmare.

Charles Dumas is a director of Lombard Street Research.

Bangalore's program for success

Carl Mortished reports on the growth of India's Silicon Valley

Picture this: palm trees, a basketball court and a cluster of low-rise office buildings; a group of young people, twentysomething, dressed in polo shirts, khakis and trainers are milling about with the breezy confidence of the overeducated middle class. It is early morning but pleasantly warm.

Where are you? A college campus in Seattle or perhaps a US high-tech firm in Palo Alto, California? The boss appears, a middle-aged man in blue jeans and a T-shirt that fits the industry's informal culture.

But wait a minute, everyone appears to be Asian. Wandering down the road, you pass a huge satellite dish and two oxen pulling a cart. Nearby, a woman balances a basket of wet cement on her head and walks barefoot across a building site. This is India.

The company you have just visited is Infosys, one of several hundred software businesses that have turned Bangalore, once a sleepy Indian Army garrison town, into an electronic Klondike. In the space of five years, the population has grown from 1.5 million to five million. India's best and brightest graduates are fleeing south from the stifling heat and dust of the northern plains to the balmy climate and fashionable bars of Bangalore.

Meanwhile, the country's best export, computer scientists and mathematicians, are making their way home, dragging with them their employers, companies such as Oracle

and IBM. This month, Infosys was launched on the Nasdaq stock exchange where its share price soared, valuing the business at more than \$2 billion.

It has made many dollar millionaires out of its youthful staff; when the company joined the Bombay Stock Exchange in 1992, the founders set aside 10 per cent of the equity, issuing warrants to employees, which can be exercised at 100 rupees (150p). Seven years on, the shares, taking account of stock splits, are worth the equivalent of about 24,000 rupees. More companies are poised to follow the path to Wall Street.

Infosys and its rivals, WIPRO, Tata Consultancy Services, NIIT and countless others, provide software services. India is a poor country with little oil or minerals. Desperately lacking basic infrastructure, it boasts two assets: people and a location. A vast pool of highly educated engineers who speak English are heading for work when the staff of America's banks, insurance companies and telecom giants are lured up in bed.

United to two telecom satellites with an eye on South Asia, they log into the systems of companies such as Boeing, Northern Telecom, Bell Atlantic, Goldman Sachs, Levi

Strauss, British Airways and Unilever, updating, repairing and writing code for new programs.

Large teams work exclusively for big clients in what are known as Offshore Software Development Centres. A key source of work is the millennium bug, accounting for about 20 per cent of Infosys sales, but the company expects the euro to fill the gap after December 31, 1999.

The key to their success is cost. A typical Indian software graduate from a top technology college might command a salary of about \$6,000 (£3,700). His equivalent in Silicon Valley could ask for \$60,000, a cost arbitrage that enables Infosys to challenge rivals such as Sapient and Cambridge Technology Partners.

British Telecom has outsourced most of its software development to an Indian venture, Mahindra British Telecom, as did British Airways with its data-processing centre in Bangalore. Oracle developed the operating system for its network computer in Bangalore.

Most of the UK's clearing banks and building societies are moving back office software maintenance to India.

The success of this industry owes much to the work of Dewang Mehta, the mercurial

36-year-old president of Nasscom, the Indian software industry lobby. Like many, he left India to seek opportunities, training as an accountant and later graduating from Imperial College in London with a degree in computing.

For Mr Mehta, the brain drain has been the making of India. "Lots of people argue it is bad. But I think it is better to have brain drain than brain in the drain."

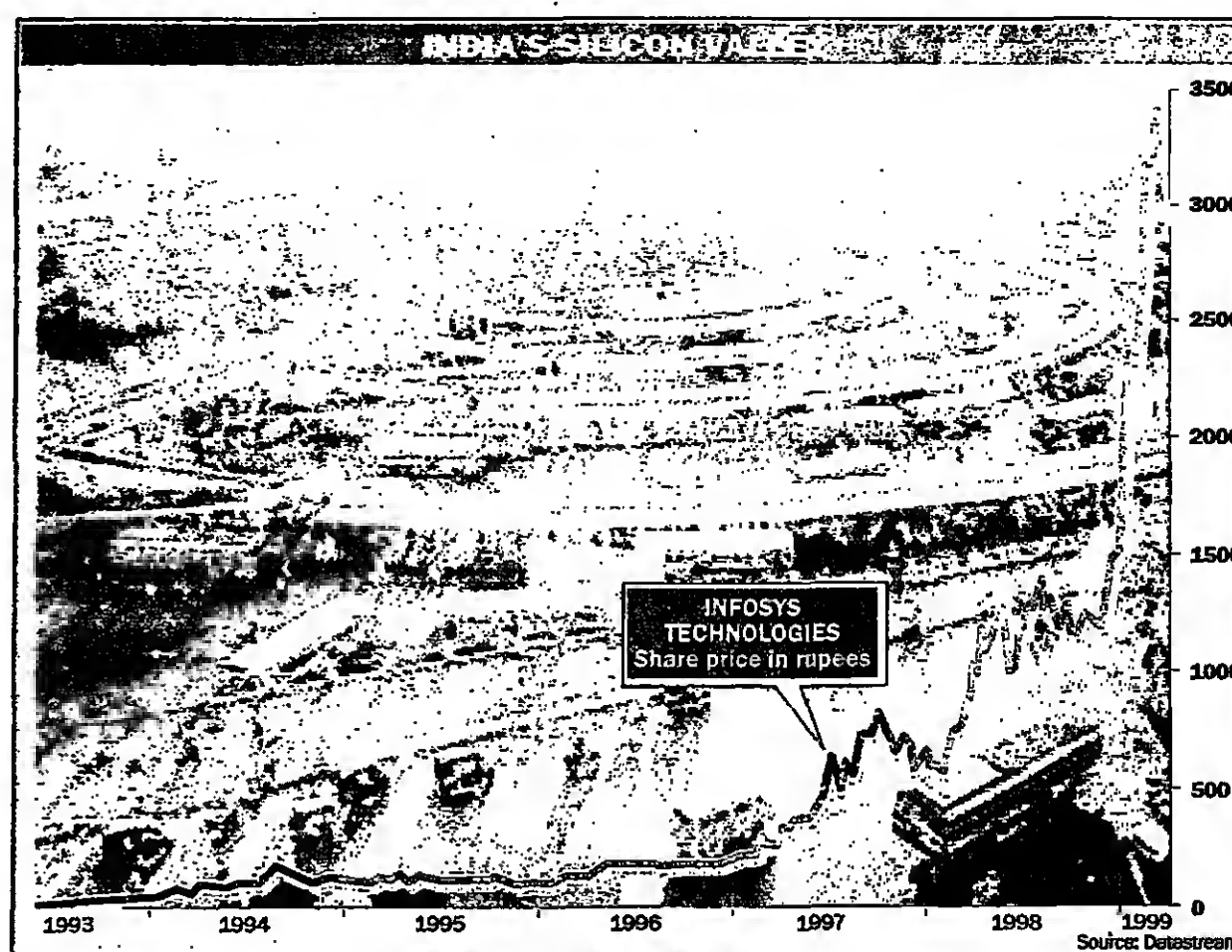
A bigger problem was convincing India's conservative establishment that this quirky, free-wheeling industry should be encouraged. Tariff barriers made it almost impossible to import the best equipment. "The Government did not understand software — they wanted us to use Russian computers."

But Mr Mehta charmed, cajoled and bullied politicians into granting concessions: bonded software technology parks allowed companies to import IBM mainframes, free of duty. Tax-free profits from exports opened up the lucrative North American and European markets.

In the space of five to ten years, the offshore software industry has grown from almost nothing to represent 10 per cent of India's \$120 billion stock market. Exports are growing by 50 per cent per year and the new software millionaires are challenging the status of India's industrial mafia; the barons who run India's textile, steel and chemical combines. The new elite are rather different and their needs and attitudes pose real challenges for India's slow-moving Government and sclerotic state-controlled industries.

Infosys was founded by Narayan Murthy in 1992. He had worked for a subsidiary of Cap Gemini in France in the 1970s. "I was a leftist when I left India and I met Communist leaders in France. But I realised that the only way to solve India's problems was to create more wealth and it is not the job of Government to create wealth."

The final blow to his left-wing sympathies came on a trip to Bulgaria where, as a result of a risky conversation in a public place, he was locked up for 72 hours by the police without food or water. "They said: 'You are from a friendly country, that is why we are letting you go.' I thought: 'Who needs friends like this.'"



Dewang Mehta talks to Rita Beri, the Indian fashion designer, on his television programme

Mr Murthy reckons that true wealth creators are few in number and need to be rewarded. In his words he wanted to create an ethically run, world-class company. Infosys is highly paternalistic and rewards its people well with zero-interest home loans, marriage loans, a health centre, sauna and canteen (lunch costs 8p).

Every employee — called Infosians in the company jargon — gets a birthday present; this year it is a backpack. "We wanted to make this a fun place to work."

And it is popular. Infosys received 71,000 job applications last year — only 1,500 were made offers. Mr Murthy has created an oasis of talent and opportunity in a world where the latter is in critically short supply. Infosys is literally an oasis: frequent power cuts mean it must generate its own electricity; water is tankered in and company buses provide staff transport to work.

The Infosians of Bangalore are still doing well as an island of free-wheeling high-tech capitalism but the rest of

India remains dependent on government control of an infrastructure that is crumbling. Labour costs are going up; salaries in Bangalore are rising 20-25 per cent a year, threatening to erode the cost advantage over the long term.

Critical for the software industry is new investment in power generation and in the ramshackle telephone network, however, privatisation still seems far off. Foreign investors like AT&T and British Telecom have had their fingers burnt in a clumsy auction of telecom licences. AT&T recently sued the Government in an attempt to escape the crippling licence fee.

Privatisation means taking on vested interests: unions, civil servants. Not an easy task in a country that provides no safety net for the unemployed. But the software industry is providing a challenge to the traditional Indian powerbase and the software gurus, such as Dewang Mehta, are almost messianic in their belief that free information flow is empowering. Five million Indians tune into a Sunday morning televi-

sion programme about computers hosted by Mr Mehta and India's Mr Software has other ideas. He wants to install computers with Internet links in the STDIs, the telephone shops that provide communications for the hundreds of millions of Indians without phones.

He recently carried out an experiment. Half of India's population is illiterate making e-mail an irrelevance, so he found 18 taxi-drivers in

Bombay and hooked them up by video e-mail to their families in the countryside.

For one driver, Ram Singh, recently married and alone in the big smoke, it was an emotional moment. It took some time to convince his wife to remove her veil in front of the camera. But a few minutes later she was complaining about the cost of the video compared with ordinary e-mail. She decided they must learn to read and write.

How difficult is it to expand your Internet connection to company-wide Internet communications? EASY PEASY.

Volume fall

AS THE rail industry will soon find out, Tom Winsor of Denton Hall drew up the legislation that is supposed to punish train companies for poor performance and has long wanted it enforced with proper severity.

Quite by chance, I once witnessed his negotiating skills at first hand. It was in a restaurant close to Denton Hall's offices off Fleet Street, and the manager was subjecting the lunchtime and largely business clientele to dance music at a volume that prevent-

ed normal conversation. Winsor asked him to turn it down. The manager refused.

Winsor then pointed out, in lawyerly fashion, 1) the proximity of Denton Hall's offices, 2) the large number of Denton Hall partners there today as a result, 3) the fact that none were especially fond of disco music, and 4) the effect on the restaurant's cashflow if they went elsewhere.

They turned the music down.

FROM *Elderstreet Investments' guide to TechTalk, and the world of technology venture capitalists' where English is often a second language:* Helpline: an engaged telephone: see Hotline.

Hotline: an engaged telephone with recorded music.

Core business: the only part of corporate activity the board can explain to the City.

Wilde at heart

JUDITH MAYHEW, chairman of policy and resources at the Corporation of London, may have given up her post on the board of Britain in Europe, the pro-Europe pressure group, but she has not given up her European ambitions.

Britain in Europe is now pressing



her to stay on as an "observer" once the European elections are on us in June. She is considering the idea, and if she accepts will again emphasise that the role is unconnected to her chairmanship of the Corporation committee and reflects her partnership in Wilde Sapte, the law firm.

This will not satisfy those City critics who oppose any involvement by such a Corporation figure in a political lobbying group while the Corporation's own stance on the euro is officially neutral. Mayhew is not out of the woods yet, I fear.

Family ties

ACQUISITION Strategy and Implementation is a scholarly work inspired by sometimes painful family experiences for Nancy Hubbard, a

consultant and academic. She has proven, through statistical analysis, that three quarters of companies involved in hostile takeovers underperform thereafter.

Several management consultants have come to similar conclusions before. But Hubbard's father, William, ran SCM, one of Hanson's victims. An even bloodier battle was the Blue Circle takeover of Birimid, headed by her father-in-law, Peter Prateley. The book is a roman d'clef in which case histories drawn from real life appear, facts carefully amended to protect the innocent. "It was a personal interest," Hubbard says tactfully.

Plus I hear another very big name has become entangled in the inquiry.

Musical youth

THIS is Edmond Warner, head of European equities at BT Alex Brown, preparing for a new career after the Deutsche Bank takeover. He is in Sydney buying a didgeridoo, I put it to him. Normally they plead mistaken identity, or something equally pathetic. But he comes clean. "I'm finding my inner self." Warner carried the thing home and then found that he couldn't play it. "My five-year-old daughter is better than I am."

MARTIN WALLER
citydiary@the-times.co.uk



Blowout Edmond Warner gets in touch with his 'inner self'

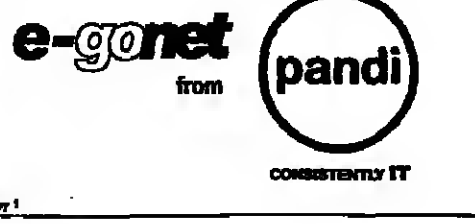


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Delta hopes cut in payout heralds recovery

BY ADAM JONES

DELTA, the struggling engineering, yesterday said that it is to halve its dividend, but that it hoped that the cut will draw a line under turmoil in the company.

Delta has had to extricate itself from the cut-throat cablemaking industry, offloading some businesses to BICC in 1998 and agreeing to sell the rest earlier this month. The disposals were the subject of £76.3 million of provisions made in 1997.

Although there was no need to increase these provisions in the 1998 figures released yesterday, Delta was still hit by currency and export difficulties. Pre-tax profits fell from £47.8 million to £41.7 million, excluding exceptional items and discontinued activities. On the same basis, sales rose from £534.3 million to £663 million.

Exports to Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong were hit by the strong pound. Jon Scott-Maxwell, chief executive, said that Delta had also suffered in Australia and South Africa, where it makes products for local mining industries, because of falls in the Australian dollar and the rand. The combined currency hit was £8 million.

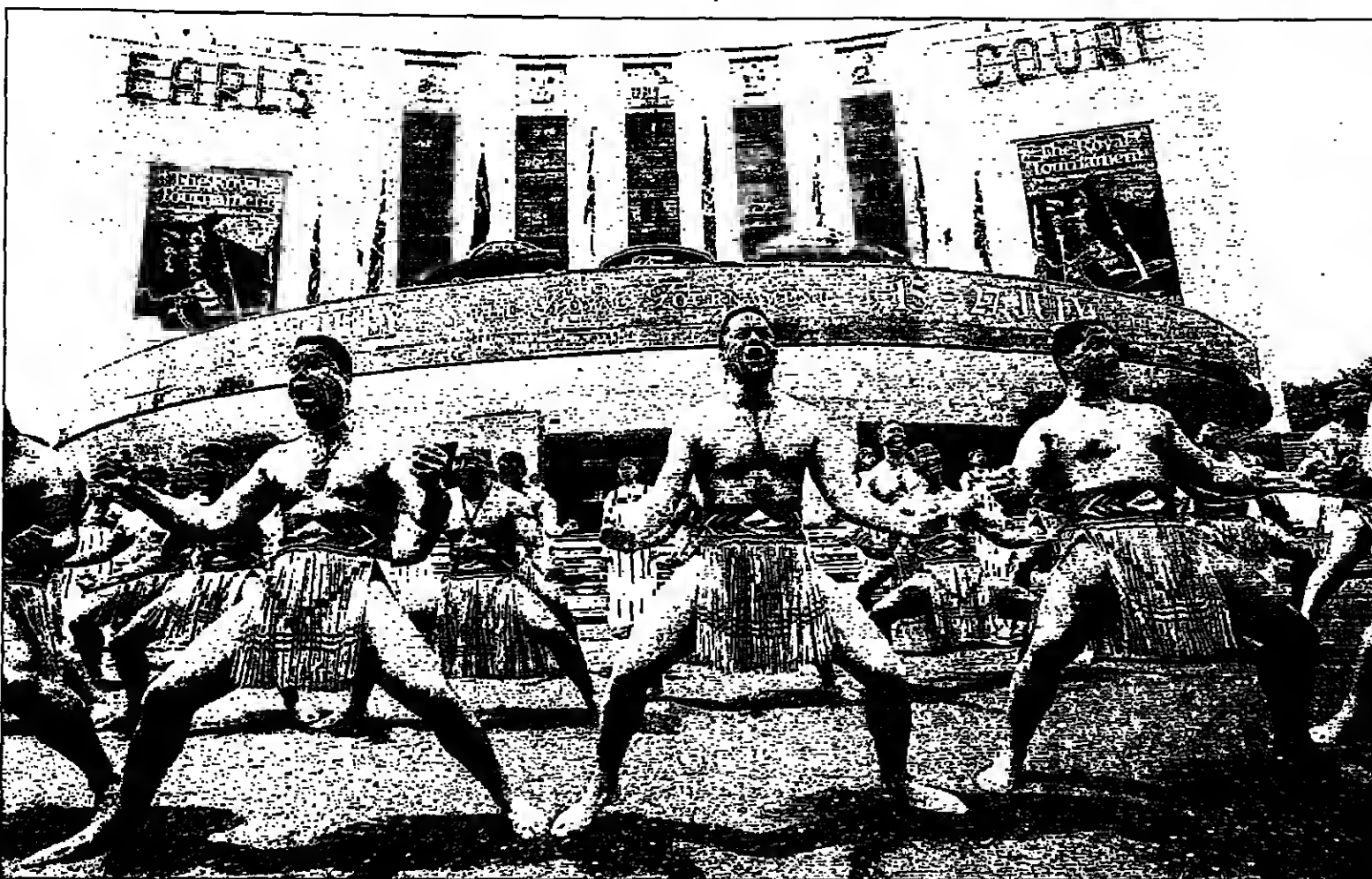
A further £10 million was lost through the downturn in Asia. Mr Scott-Maxwell said Far East conditions had stabilised, but he did not expect big improvements this year.

So far in 1999, about 200 jobs have been cut in the European plumbing businesses. Gearing is likely to fall from 67 per cent to about 50 per cent in the next few months.

Earnings per share were 15.1p up from 1997's loss per share of 29.5p. The total dividend is cut from 11p to 5p. The shares yesterday rose 3p to 130.1p, having fallen from a 12-month high of 340p.

Tempos, page 28

P&O's proposed disposal highlights shortage of exhibition space



The Earls Court exhibition centre, which has been put up for sale by P&O, plays host to a wide variety of shows, events and organisations

FOR the first time in living memory one of the UK's few leading specialist exhibition centres is up for grabs.

P&O yesterday said that, in its drive to move away from property towards its core business of cruises, ferries and ports, one of its key disposals would be the Earls Court Olympia Exhibition Centre, host of events from the Ideal Home Exhibition and the London Boat Show to concerts by Oasis.

Last year 3.25 million people passed through its doors and it hosted 32,000 exhibitors, 140 exhibitions and 120 conferences.

The centre, with a combined floor space of 108,000 sq m is second in size only to Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre, which after the opening of its 30,000 sq m extension at the end of last year now has a floor space of more than 190,000 sq m. Languishing far behind the two giants, the UK's third and fourth-largest centres are the Wembley Conference and Exhibition Centre and Coventry's NAC Stoneleigh Park, both with just 16,000 sq m.

This seemingly huge disparity is one factor that will have to be taken into consideration when a price tag is eventually placed on the site. Although it has net operating assets of £181 million, its value is sure to rise significantly above this figure because it is the only site in London capable of staging major exhibitions on a scale demanded by international companies needing a springboard into the UK market.

"It's not as if you could compare it to selling a terraced house, looking at another sold down the road a few weeks back," says Austin Hawkins, deputy director of the Association of Exhibition Organisers (AEO). "It is in a unique position. The UK has always had a

Earls Court puts spotlight on capital locations

shortage of exhibition space, especially in Central London." There is more exhibition space in Paris than in the whole of the UK. Although a veritable giant when compared with other UK centres, the Earls Court site is dwarfed by its European counterparts.

However, the construction of the second phase of a new international exhibition centre in London is currently under way. Excel, on the north side of the Royal Victoria Dock, near Docklands, is to have 66,000 sq m of exhibition hall space, 24,000 sq m of conference meeting and banqueting accommodation, and parking

for 5,000 cars. Three on-site hotels with 1,000 bedrooms are planned for later phases.

The backers of Excel — which include the London Docklands Development Corporation and Country Heights Holdings, a Malaysian property developer — say they are about to make an "imminent announcement" about a bond issue to raise funds necessary to complete its second phase.

With turnover of £850 million and annual growth of 5 per cent, the UK's exhibition sector is not to be sniffed at. But in international terms the UK is limping, behind the main competitors. In May the

exhibitions industry is due to launch a £200,000 advertising campaign aimed at highlighting the business potential of UK sites such as Earls Court.

"Only about a dozen exhibitions are genuinely international or have world significance," says Mr Hawkins. "Although it is good to have a major centre at Birmingham, in the middle of the country, foreigners aren't keen to go all that way."

The AEO says that, if successful, the backers of Excel may well expand it. However, the AEO is also continuing to lobby the Government to create a new space in Central London for conferences and exhibitions that could compete with not just continental, but also American cities.

"Millions of pounds are lost throughout the whole UK economy because we do not have the facilities to cater for international conferences — contractors, business travel, hotels and shops, not to mention potential partnerships of exhibiting companies with UK companies."

Which all goes to make Earls Court Olympia a magnificent opportunity for someone willing to invest in the venue.

Hays to spend £36m on two acquisitions

HAYS, the services conglomerate, is to spend up to £36.8 million making two new acquisitions, one in France and one in the UK. The company, headed by Ronnie Frost, is to pay up to £170 million (£19.5 million) for Ceritex, a call centre company in France that provides helpdesk services for French blue chip companies. Hays is paying an initial £120 million, with the balance depending on performance. Ceritex last year had operating profits of £16.2 million on sales of £726 million and had net debt of £72.2 million.

Hays is to pay up to £17.3 million for Crawford's Computers, a privately owned British company that provides database and management services for such clients as Lloyds TSB and the Nationwide Building Society. It is paying an initial £12.3 million for the company, with the rest based on future profits. Crawford's last year had sales of £5.3 million and operating profits of £800,000. Both Crawford's and Ceritex are to be spun into Hays's new Business Process Support division. Mr Frost said: "Ceritex marks Business Process Support's first move into continental Europe in line with our strategy of expanding our UK operations overseas. Both operations present excellent opportunities for strong profit growth."

Ascot cheers the City

ASCOT, the specialist engineer and chemicals group, cheered the market yesterday after reporting a 20 per cent increase in earnings for last year, and said that it had started the current year ahead of expectations. The company reported pre-tax profits of £27 million for 1998, down from £30.7 million last year. However, after stripping out exceptional items, adjusted earnings per share came in at 30p, up from 25.1p. A final dividend of 7.5p is being paid, making a total of 11p, a rise of 22 per cent. The company's shares rose 12 1/2p to 265p.

Sherwood still upbeat

SHERWOOD, the Nottingham lace and lingerie group, said that business in 1999 had improved after a 1998 ravaged by the downturn in consumer spending and the fall in the worldwide demand for lace. The company made a £6.5 million 1998 pre-tax loss after £12 million losses at operations from which it has exited, and £7.2 million restructuring charges. The loss per share was 8.9p, against earnings in 1997 of 4p per share. At the operating level, the company made profits of £10.1 million (£11.1 million). The final and total dividends remain unchanged at 2.3p and 3.6p respectively.

Danka sells division

DANKA BUSINESS SYSTEMS, one of the worst-performing shares on the stock market, had some relief yesterday when it announced that it is selling Danka Services International, its outsourcing business, to Schroder Ventures. The price has not been disclosed. DSI, which is based in Rochester, New York, last year had sales of \$275 million (£170 million). Danka will continue to hold a minority interest in the business. Shares of Danka Business Systems, which have tumbled from 848p less than three years ago, put on 1 1/2p to 83p yesterday.

Baynes poor forecast

THE manufacturing climate in the first months of 1999 is proving no better than it was at the end of 1998, according to Charles Baynes, the industrial components maker. Bruce McInnes, the chairman, said: "In the year ahead we expect the UK manufacturing sector to continue to be weak and only start improving in 2000." The company reported pre-tax profits before exceptional items for 1998 down 20 per cent to £18.1 million. Earnings per share came in at 6.68p (7.54p). The dividend remains unchanged at 3.2p.

BLP cuts dividend

BLP, the manufacturer of veneer and PVC products, reported a 22 per cent fall in pre-tax profits to £1.9 million for 1998, and cut the dividend, but said that its UK operations were recovering after a rapid downturn in business in the fourth quarter. Malcolm Cohen, the chairman, said: "We have seen some strengthening of our order books and the level of quotations is very encouraging." Earnings per share dropped to 8.3p from 27.6p. The final dividend of 2.5p makes a total of 5p, against 7.5p for 1997.

PPL gets go-ahead

PPL THERAPEUTICS, the firm producing medicines from the milk of genetically modified sheep, has secured the capacity to allow the full-scale commercial manufacture of AAT, its possible treatment for cystic fibrosis (writes Paul Durman).

This follows the decision by

authorities in New Zealand to grant PPL permission to expand its flock of AAT-producing sheep from 147 to up to 10,000. Recent trial results suggested that patients will need to take high doses of AAT to reduce the lung infections caused by cystic fibrosis. The shares ticked up 14p to 107 1/2p.

Tesco to invest in South Korea

BY DOMINIC WALSH

TESCO, the supermarket group, is to invest £130 million in developing a chain of hypermarkets in South Korea in partnership with Samsung, the electronics giant.

The joint venture will initially have net assets of £160 million, with Tesco investing £80 million in cash and the South Korean group injecting assets worth a similar amount. The assets are two hypermarkets trading as Homeplus and three development sites.

Tesco will initially own 51 per cent of the joint venture, but it will pay a further £50 million in June to lift its stake to 81 per cent. The two Homeplus outlets, averaging 90,000 sq ft, are in Taegu and Pusan, just outside Seoul. At least five more openings are planned in the next three years.

Tesco, which in recent years has established a presence in Central Europe, said that its South Korean move was part of a strategy of expanding into underdeveloped markets. Last year it entered Asia by acquiring 13 Lotus hypermarkets in Thailand and it continues to seek opportunities in Taiwan.

David McCarthy, an analyst for BT Alex Brown, said that although Tesco's diversifications into foreign markets and personal finance would not make significant profits for three to four years, the group was "developing a coherent long-term strategy". He said that, outside the UK, Tesco was now operating in countries with a total population of 170 million people.

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CHANGING TIMES

Tradepoint wins chance to trade UK shares in US

By CAROLINE MERRELL

TRADEPOINT, the company set up to rival the London Stock Exchange, has won approval to operate in the US, after a lengthy battle. Approval from the SEC, the US financial regulator, means that the company will be able to offer its services to US-based fund managers who will be able to buy UK equities direct and without going through an intermediary. It is the first time that the SEC has allowed a foreign exchange to trade in the US. Shares of Tradepoint, which

is itself quoted on London's Alternative Investment Market, almost doubled yesterday rising 174p to 36p. The company floated at 175p in 1996 but the shares dived soon afterwards. Tradepoint has already raised up about £30 million of losses and admitted yesterday that it was seeking some more finance. It said: "The company can confirm it is in discussions with a number of financing parties and is currently considering the most appropriate of these options."

In the UK, Tradepoint has signed up only 81 companies. Nic Stuchfield, the chief executive, said: "Tradepoint will open the way for US investors to trade in UK equities with much greater ease and at greatly reduced costs." Mr Stuchfield added: "The transaction costs for US fund managers dealing in UK equities in the US is very high." He said he wanted to go live with five or six fund managers within three months. Mr Stuchfield said that Tradepoint's share of transactions on the UK stock market varied between 0.5 and 1 per cent. To break even the company's share of transactions has to reach about 1.3 per cent market share.

Under the agreement with the SEC, Tradepoint has bypassed complex and onerous disclosure rules that have in the past effectively prevented an overseas exchange from setting up in the world's biggest market.

In turn, Tradepoint has had to agree a cap on its volumes of 10 per cent of trade on the established London Exchange, though the company acknowledged that Tradepoint was in no immediate risk of bumping up against that level. The approval from the SEC came after an application originally submitted in October 1997.



John Severs, left, Severfield-Reeve's managing director, Peter Davison, finance director, and Peter Levine, chairman

Severfield wary after 11% rise

SEVERFIELD-REEVE, the structural steel group, has reported an 11 per cent rise in underlying pre-tax profits in 1998, but struck a cautious note on prospects for this year (Martin Barrow writes). The company said that although the year had started well in its core steelwork business, there is increasing evidence of a tightening of prices and margins. However, Peter Levine, chairman, said that the current order book remained strong at £50 million. Pre-tax profits for 1998 rose to £10.2 million before exceptional items, from £9.4 million in 1997. Adjusted earnings per share rose by 11 per cent, to 35.9p. The company also booked an exceptional gain of £1.7 million on disposal of non-core businesses. A 7p final dividend makes 12p, up from 10p. The shares yesterday rose 6p to 317p. However, they remain at a sharp discount to a 12-month high of 601p struck last year.

Fitch recommends £26m takeover

By MARTIN BARROW

FITCH, the design and branding consultancy, has joined the rush of smaller companies defecting from the stock market. The company is recommending a £26 million takeover bid by Lighthouse Acquisition Company Inc, a US private investment and management company. The offer is worth 62p a share in cash. Shareholders

will also receive a second interim dividend of 0.69p a share. Taken together, the offer represents a premium of 66.1 per cent to Monday's closing share price. Acceptances have been received in respect of 51.2 per cent of Fitch's share capital. Yesterday Fitch reported £2.6 million pre-tax profits for 1998, up from £2.2 million in 1997.

Hunting hit by oil price weakness

By PAUL ARMSTRONG

WEAK oil prices have taken a harsh toll of profits at Hunting but the petroleum and defence group said that it expects the tough environment in the industry to provide acquisition opportunities this year. Hunting said yesterday that its 1998 pre-tax profit rose just 4 per cent to £40.4 million. The result would have been far

worse had cost cuts not helped to offset a 25 per cent fall in turnover to £981.8 million. Ken Miller, chief executive, said that trading conditions in the oil division deteriorated sharply in the second half, driving down its profit for the year to £23 million, from £31.6 million previously. Hunting's defence operations recorded a 6.6 per cent rise in profit to £25.9 million

thanks to work that it won on the Apache helicopter. A proposed 0.5p final makes an unchanged total of 9.25p. Mr Miller said that it would take about three months for the recent recovery in oil prices to flow through to Hunting's bottom line, but added that, provided the gains were retained, earnings should improve in the second half. Hunting cut costs in its oil

operations by £5 million last year, partly as a result of a 20 per cent reduction in staff to about 800. He said that there was scope for further reductions, although the savings would not match those recorded last year. Hunting's defence division has secured two new contracts since the end of the year, each worth about £50 million. The first involves orders from the

Ministry of Defence for an integrated biological defence system, and the second is for batteries and chargers as part of the Armed Forces' Bowman project. He said that Hunting's improved balance sheet and interest cover of 9.3 times had prompted it to study several acquisition opportunities, some of which were still under "active consideration".

Norske Bank in merger

By MARTIN BARROW

THE wave of mergers in European banking continued yesterday in Norway when Den norske Bank and the state-run Postbanken announced that they are merging to create that country's largest financial services group. The deal, valued at Kr4.5 billion (£536 million), is expected to yield annual cost savings of Kr450 million by the end of 2003. Combined assets will total Kr315 billion, making the new group the eighth-largest financial services company in the Nordic region, with 7,500 employees.

The merger is expected to be completed by May 14. It is conditional on approval by Norway's Communications Ministry and Finance Ministry. The Norwegian parliament must also approve a change in the legal status of Postbanken, which is being restructured ahead of its privatisation.

Amey builds case for move to new sector

By ADAM JONES

AMEY is trying to shed its construction group image and move to the more fashionable support services sector of the London Stock Exchange.

The group has been pressing for the move since November, but has not had a reply from the Exchange committee responsible for classification. Brian Staples, Amey's chief executive, said: "It is one of the inevitable next steps for the group."

Amey has moved away from dependence on construction to focus on outsourced work as diverse as managing buildings and running organisations' information technology help-desks. Mr Staples said: "This year, 90 per cent of our earnings are from support services rather than construction." Amey yesterday announced

1998 pre-tax profits of £18.7 million, up from £14.6 million in 1997. Sales rose from £399.4 million to £471 million.

Construction still accounts for the bulk of sales, however, contributing £228.5 million in turnover, but just £2.3 million in profits. The company said that this was still "way short" of an acceptable profit margin.

Mr Staples said that he expected the identity to be announced, in the next few weeks, of Amey's partners in a bid to manage part of the London Underground infrastructure.

He was not yet able to say how much the recent failed bid for Servisair would cost.

Earnings per share rose 35 per cent to 42.02p (31.11p). A 9p final dividend makes 13.5p, up 23 per cent. The shares rose 42p to 632p.

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Equities beat ragged retreat

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ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

BANKS

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

BREWERIES, PUBS & REST

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

BUILDING MATERIALS

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

CHEMICALS

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

CONSTRUCTION

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

DISTRIBUTORS

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIALS

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

ELECTRICITY

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

ELECTRONIC & ELECT

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

ENGINEERING

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

ENGINEERING, VEHICLES

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

FOOD MANUFACTURERS

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

HEALTHCARE

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

HOUSEHOLD GDS & TEXT

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

INSURANCE

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

INVESTMENT TRUSTS

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100



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1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

SHORTS (under 5 years)

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

LONGS (over 10 years)

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

UNDATED

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

BRITISH FUNDS

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

INDEX-LINKED on projected inflation of

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

RETAILERS, FOOD

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

RETAILERS, GENERAL

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

WATER

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

ALTERNATIVE INV MARKET


1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

SUPPORT SERVICES

1998-99	Price	%	1998-99	Price	%
High	Low	Company	High	Low	Company
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100
100	95	100	100	95	100

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Why builders must do better

Rachel Kelly on new rules to stop cowboy builders from taking you for a ride

Cowboy builders beware. In a crackdown on rogue workers, a government task force has recommended cash compensation to homeowners who have suffered at their hands. Other recommendations that have just landed on the desk of Nick Raynsford, the junior Environment Minister, include a national helpline giving details of firms with a "quality mark" and a cut in VAT on maintenance and repair, which was ignored in the Budget. The quality mark would be backed by warranties with a minimum level of £100, which would cover homeowners against the failure of major repair work or extensions. There would also be a standard contract for small works, and a national publicity campaign for a quality mark and testing of staff for competence. The suggestions are the culmination of nearly a year's work by a task force headed by Tony Merricks, the general manager of Balfour Beatty's specialist contracting business. The ideas are expected to be put out for consultation, followed by a six-month study before the system is introduced in summer next year. The proposal that has met most government resistance is the plan to cut VAT on repairs and maintenance. One of the classic routes of the disreputable builder is to offer work at a reduced rate to avoid paying



Cowboy builders are not a modern phenomenon, as Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy prove in *The Finishing Touch*, 1928

VAT. Reform would reduce the price differential between honest firms and the tax-evading cowboys. The report says: "Although it is understood that a reduction in the rate at which it is applied would be difficult given European Union regulations, it is considered that lowering the threshold would in itself be of benefit in creating a more level playing field." Less controversial is a scheme floated last April by Mr Raynsford. Contractors would get the mark after being assessed by an accreditation body that could be run by an existing trade association. Industry bodies wishing to provide such accreditation might have to pay about £30,000 to deal with the cost of complaints. This in turn would mean higher fees from firms wishing to subscribe.

There will be greater protection, too, for new homeowners from next month. The National House Building Council is seeking to restore a reputation tarnished by accusations that it is too heavily weighted in favour of housebuilders.

John Callcut, the chief executive of Britain's fourteenth largest housebuilder, Crest Nicholson, called on the NHBC last month to publish league tables of housebuilders so that buyers can see which companies perform best. The NHBC is naturally nervous of printing such information, while its main funding comes

from builders themselves. But it has announced plans to extend its cover for new homeowners to include the cost of making good contaminated land on sites registered with the NHBC after April 1. Jane Chapman, from the NHBC, says: "New homeowners of NHBC-registered houses will benefit from protection if and where a statutory clean-up notice is served under the Environment Act, expected this July." Such cover might seem unimportant, but in a climate of growing environmental and political pressure to develop more brownfield land, such protection is crucial. Furthermore, from the autumn, the

NHBC is introducing a revised inspection service which will allow its inspectors to increase the number of visits where they identify a potentially difficult site.

Both sets of proposals to ostracise crooks and rogues, whether working on old properties or new, still rely on self-regulation. That was Mr Raynsford's implicit message in appointing Mr Merricks to run his task force and leaving the NHBC to improve its act.

The building industry is naturally keen to emphasise that charlatans are in the minority. Ian Davis, the director-general of the Federation of Master Builders, says: "The cowboy element damages the reputation of the building industry, but in reality this group is very small." But trading standards officers receive about 100,000 complaints a year against builders, dwarfing those they receive about second-hand car dealers. Time will tell whether the building trade can clean up its own act. In Australia, the message

■ **THE** Wimpole Street house where Paul McCartney wrote *I Want to Hold Your Hand* is available to rent. In the Sixties the house was leased by the Asher family. McCartney, who dated Jane Asher until 1968, also lived there and also wrote *We Can Work It Out: Here, There and Everywhere* and *And I Love Her*. The four-bedroom house is for rent through Egerton's Marylebone office for £2,000 a week.

■ **THE** Old Rectory in Old Northampton is for sale. Robert Tounson lived there when he was made chaplain to King James I. Dean of Westminster, Robert Tounson is remembered among other things for preventing ladies in yellow ruffs or in "mannish attire" from entering the abbey when he was Dean of Westminster. More memorably he was instructed to be alongside Sir Walter Raleigh when he was in prison and also at his death. The house is for sale through Bidwells Northampton for £650,000.

■ **THE** Sandridge Barton estate on the banks of the River Dart in South Devon is for sale. This was the birthplace of John Davis, the Tudor Arctic explorer who sailed with his party from Dartmouth on June 7, 1575 in two small ships, the *Sunshine* and the *Moonshine*, and discovered the Davis Strait, the passage between Baffin Island in Canada and Greenland. The English were convinced that if you could go around North America you could get to China by a shorter route. He made three trips in all but the Spanish Armada in 1588 interrupted the explorations of not only Davis but also his friends, Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Sir Walter Raleigh. The house is for sale through Knight Frank's Exeter office for £3 million.

■ **A** HOUSE in Ibiza designed by the musician Mike Oldfield is for sale. The composer of *Tubular Bells* designed "Atlantis" as a 3D model on his computer and an architect then translated his ideas into reality. Included in the

£2.2 million asking price is a 1987 Mercedes C-class saloon, a Jeep Wrangler and a Sunseeker Tomahawk 43 powerboat. Hampsons International is the agent selling the house.

■ **THE** historic 383-acre estate of St Oysth Priory in Essex is for sale for £1.7 million, down from £2.3 million last year. In 1954 the priory was bought by Somerset de Chair, the soldier, author and Member of Parliament. Mr de Chair had two passions in his life - women and property. He was married four times and had previously owned Chatham Castle in Kent and Trevelyan Manor in Cornwall. Bidwells is selling the estate. There are opportunities to buy individual properties on the estate as private dwellings.

■ **A** HOUSE on the Earl of Shelburne's estate at Bowood House near Calne, Wiltshire, is for rent. The Earl of Shelburne is a friend of the Prince of Wales. The grounds at Bowood were landscaped by "Capability" Brown. So-called "Capability" Brown, the English landscape architect, said that if you could go around North America you could get to China by a shorter route. He made three trips in all but the Spanish Armada in 1588 interrupted the explorations of not only Davis but also his friends, Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Sir Walter Raleigh. The house is for sale through Knight Frank's Exeter office for £3 million.

■ **THE** Grove at Sonning, Berkshire, is for sale. The 17th-century Grade II listed house is rumoured to have once been the home of Eisenhower's mistress, Kay Summersby. Grove End, an addition to the house, is also for sale. It was built as a haven for refugees of the French Revolution and has since become a separate home. FPD Savills is selling the Grove for £750,000 and Grove End for £290,000.

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Offer is extended by one month

Quentin Blake
Mrs Armitage in Wheels

Three prizes specially signed by Chris Evans

Why Sally Dexter is in love with Shakespeare

Why Sally Dexter is in love with Shakespeare

THE TIMES
FREE BOOKS SCHOOLS



Crisp performance. Keelan Tootell, 4, from Sale in Cheshire, who has amassed more than 2,000 tokens at a rate of more than 100 a week. His mother, Marnee, delivered 500 leaflets to homes asking for their help

Token collectors given extra time

By HANNAH BETTS

THE *Times* Free Books for Schools offer is being extended by a month after huge demand from the 32,000 schools registered with the scheme.

Saving tokens to exchange for books from the 164 titles available has become something of a national pastime, which will now continue until the end of April.

Letters to *The Times* have told of well-dressed gentlemen raiding litter bins at dawn and children forced into scavenging missions by eager parents. Last week George Mudie, the junior Education Minister, was identified as the mystery purveyor of tokens at the House of Commons.

This Free Books for Schools mania is paying off — 25 million tokens have been redeemed since the scheme started in January, bringing 145,000 new books into classrooms.

The West Midlands is the area with the largest number of tokens redeemed — 2,306,487 — providing the region with 12,925 new books. Wednesbury Oak Primary in Tipton, West Midlands, has the accolade of having redeemed the most tokens so far: 51,800.

The ten most popular books reveal the dominance of primary schools as the most ardent token collectors. *Blitz*, Robert Westall's collection of Second World War stories, tops the list, with almost 5,000 orders.

TOP CHOICES

- 1 *Blitz*, by Robert Westall - 4,828 orders
- 2 *Mrs Armitage in Wheels*, by Quentin Blake - 4,500
- 3 *Bears in the Night*, by Stan and Jan Berenstain - 4,249
- 4 *Catherine and the Lion*, by Clare Jarrett - 4,249
- 5 *Spacewalk*, by Henrietta Branford - 3,786
- 6 *Foot in Sock*, by Dr Seuss - 3,749
- 7 *The Dancing Bear*, by Michael Morpurgo - 3,397
- 8 *The Butterfly Lion*, by Michael Morpurgo - 3,314
- 9 *Our Field*, by Betty Doherty and Robin Bell-Corfield - 3,136
- 10 *Micky and the Twins*, by Tony Bradman and Susan Winer - 3,135

Quentin Blake's *Mrs Armitage in Wheels* and *Bears in the Night*, by Stan and Jan Berenstain, are not far behind.

Clare Jarrett's first book, *Catherine and the Lion*, came in at fourth place with 4,120 orders. Mrs Jarrett wrote the book for her eldest daughter, Catherine, now aged nine, who is the story's eponymous heroine. Her next work, *Dancing Maddy*, will star Catherine's seven-year-old sister. Both girls have been feverishly collecting tokens and are proud to have Catherine's book in the *Times* top ten.

Michael Morpurgo occupies

the opposite professional extreme, having had more than 50 children's books published. The author has the distinction of having two titles in top ten and is a staunch supporter of the Free Books for Schools initiative.

"What is wonderful about this scheme is that it has brought good-quality children's books to schools that otherwise would not have had access to them," Morpurgo said.

"What we need in this country is a culture where libraries are seen as an integral part of every school — not an optional extra should a school be able to afford it."

Morpurgo admires the diversity of interests represented in the scheme. "We have a problem in Britain that reading is thought of as an activity for a certain kind of person. I like the idea that these tokens are found both on packets of crisps and in *The Times* — it helps to dispel these preconceptions. Schools should be flooded with books, so that children can get to grips with the feel, the taste and the smell of them. It is their birthright and their heritage."

It is this shared conviction that has led *The Times* to extend the Free Books for Schools campaign, a fitting enterprise to end a century in which literacy has at last become the right of all the nation's children.

Tokens, pages 24 & 30

Braille titles snapped up

By GEORGE PENDLE

BLIND children across the country are seizing their chance to gain braille books for their schools.

Braille books cost up to ten times as much as printed books and often wear out after only a few readings as the raised dots are pushed back into the paper, so the chance to get them for as few as 100 tokens in the Free Books for

Schools scheme has been warmly welcomed.

Kevin Tansley, the head teacher at the Royal Blind School in Edinburgh, said that most of the school's 118 pupils used braille, despite the advent of computer programs that can enlarge text for partially sighted people or even read it to them.

"The equipment is bulky and expensive and does not offer the independence needed

to read for pleasure — you can't take a scanner to bed with you," he said.

Sue Bennett, the head of braille studies at the Joseph Clark School for the Visually Impaired in London, is equally pleased with the scheme. "We have collected 8,000 tokens so far," she said. "It is very difficult to get hold of braille books otherwise. For instance, a Roald Dahl book would cost us £60."

Sign up for a prize with Chris Evans

THE broadcaster Chris Evans gave his enthusiastic backing yesterday to the relaunch of *The Times* Free Books for Schools scheme.

Evans has signed three books that will be awarded to schools as prizes. *The Amber Cat*, by Hilary McKay, *Spacebaby*, by Henrietta Branford, and *Foot in Sock*, by Dr Seuss, all bearing Evans's words of support, will be awarded in two weeks' time to the schools with the most amusing or imaginative token-collecting strategies. These should be summarised in fewer than 50 words on the back of a postcard.

Evans is unequivocal about the merits of the campaign. "The *Times* scheme is a fantastic idea — schools must keep up their collecting."

"I did not read much as a child, so I am having to catch up now, and believe me it is hard work. If we read more books, the world would be a wittier and happier place."

Entries to win the signed books should be sent to Hannah Betts, *The Times*, Times House, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9NN, to arrive no later than Friday, April 9. Entries must include contact name and telephone number.

TOP SCHOOLS

- Wednesbury Oak Primary, Tipton, West Midlands (214)
Whitehall Junior, Walsell, West Midlands (170)
St Mark's Primary, Brierly Hill, West Midlands (156)
Hill View Primary, Banbury, Oxfordshire (156)
Richmond Primary, Hinkley, Leicestershire (144)
White Woman Lane Middle, Norwich (144)
Brookhill Lane Junior, Nottingham (127)
Park End Primary, Middlesbrough (122)
West Primary, Paisley (120)
Courthouse Green Primary, Coventry (120) <
- * Figures show number of books received so far

Lighter role for Lady Macbeth

LADY MACBETH may not be everyone's idea of a child-friendly philanthropist. But Sally Dexter, who has been acclaimed for her performance of the role in the West End of London, is proud of the play's status as the most popular of *The Times* Free Books for Schools Shake-

speare titles (Flannah Betts writes).

The Queen's Theatre production has proved so popular with youngsters that it has had to ration the number of school parties allowed for every performance. Dexter is thus in a privileged position to judge the play's appeal with

the nation's youth. "It's short," she jokes, before adding: "The play shows something extreme, but recognisable. It plugs into a deep void of pessimism that we all possess, but is ultimately a cathartic experience that provokes a great deal of compassion."

Dexter has a contagious enthusiasm for literature. "We really can learn through books. They enrich all our lives and offer a fantastic way to connect us all. I certainly give a huge thumbs up to *The Times* scheme — thumbs, fingers, feet, everything."

Her conviction that young people should be introduced to Shakespeare is that of a convert. "As a child, I thought Shakespeare was a load of old rubbish," she admitted. "I resented Shakespeare because everyone said he was wonderful and I could not even understand him."

The turning point came when she worked with Sir Peter Hall, who passed on an appreciation of the great beauty and logic of Shakespearean verse. "The language can seem like a barrier but, in fact, it is natural for us to speak in verse," she said. "Shakespeare used it because it caught the ear — it provided a book to make people listen. And the more you respect the structure of the language, the more it reveals things to you."

"We need to show children that Shakespeare is not just about exams. This need not even be through getting them acting; perhaps we could gain their interest by getting them experimenting with their own writing. Most of all we need to convince them that it is fun: Shakespeare's plays are playing with language, above all."



Sally Dexter: woo over by Shakespeare's verse

MORE TIME, MORE BOOKS — AND HOW TO GET THEM

THE month-long extension of the Free Books for Schools scheme announced today means that tokens will be carried in *The Times* until April 30.

They will also be available during April in *The Sun*, *Newspaper of the World*, *Sunday Times* and on selected packets of Walkers snacks.

Registration for the scheme closed at the end of February but the extension means the 90 per cent of British schools which have registered with the initiative can continue to build their collections of tokens. There remains no limit on the number of books schools can claim from the list of over 150 titles and the closing date for

the receipt of orders remains July 20. Orders will be delivered within 28 days of being received.

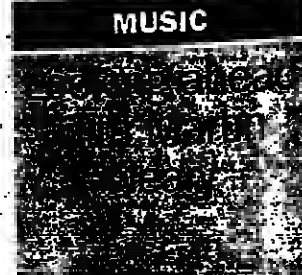
If readers do not have a school to collect for, they can ring the Free Books for Schools helpline on 0845 5040212. Tokens are charged at local rate to find out the location of the nearest participating school. This helpline number can also be called to order additional order forms, or to answer any other queries about the scheme.

Readers are encouraged to publicise the extension of Free Books for Schools throughout their local communities so that no one gives up collecting just yet.



VISUAL ART
Richard D. Johnson
as you've never
seen him
PAGE 39

THE TIMES ARTS



Oscar succumbs to overexposure

Even the security guard in the Gielgud foyer, the grim-faced Cerberus hired to expel or devour interlopers, was sporting a green carnation on the first night of Moisés Kaufman's play. Could there be a better illustration of changing attitudes towards his subject, which is Oscar Wilde? A hundred, fifty, thirty years ago he could be categorised as subversive. Now his plays are endlessly revived, and he is lionised by those who would once have been his foes. Wilde is respected going on respectable.

Yet here's a paradox to worry those who think the function of drama is to ruffle conventional feathers. The less controversial Wilde has become, the more we have seen him. Oscar after Oscar has recently sauntered across our stages and screens: Simon Callow, Stephen Fry, Liam Neeson, Corin Redgrave and the assorted actors who impersonated him in Tom Stoppard's play about Housman, *The Invention of Love*. Myself, I must admit to wondering if, fascinating though he is, he has not fascinated us long enough. Does *Gross Indecency* add enough to the Wilde files to justify bringing it all the way from New York?

Well, any Candide out there who still needs to discover what happened to Wilde in the killer year of 1895 will undoubtedly find the play informative. For others, there are two reasons for considering a trip to the Gielgud. Kaufman's main suggestion, which is that the establishment attack on Wilde was more on his literary works and artistic credo than on his personal morality, is certainly unusual. So is his play's style, which threatens to become aridly Brechtian and yet, let us concede this, introduces a degree of complexity without

THEATRE *Gross Indecency* Gielgud

losing dramatic momentum.

In the orchestra pit, just below Michael Pennington's Wilde and his friends and enemies, sit actors in Footie suits. They are, rather literally, footnotes. They switch positions and roles to become Shaw and Frank Harris, dancing prostitutes, rentboys in tatty underwear, even Queen Victoria: but much of the time they give us the scholarly references when Wilde's trials are interrupted by extracts from his writings or by the opinions of those who knew him. They allow us to see the man and his era from different angles; they tell the story of his destruction: they help Kaufman to build up a case that would, however, be more impressive if Wilde's aesthetic philosophy did not come across nowadays as little more than a dated, precious attack on Victorian puritanism.

Add a scene in which a modern prof debates the origins of the concept of "homosexuality", and the evening must sound a bit academic. With James Aubrey's mad, mottled Queensberry hoarsely barking, Clive Francis exuding whiskey sympathy as defence counsel Clarke, and Pennington's admirably cool, humorous, dignified, debonaire Wilde visibly yellowing and crumpling as cataclysm nears, that danger is successfully avoided. But I still left the theatre feeling that I had learnt little new. For all the play's strengths, I felt Oscar'd out.

BENEDICT
NIGHTINGALE



Fascinating though he is, has he not fascinated us long enough? Michael Pennington adds yet another Oscar Wilde to an already long list in Moisés Kaufman's *Gross Indecency*

Slightly pregnant

Science, as assorted media boffins regularly and ingeniously insist, may well be the new art. But can it make good theatre? On the few occasions when old and new shake up together, they invariably prove uneasy bedfellows. The devil, obviously, is in the detail. Rare, too, is the person who can straddle both forms. More's the pity: finding ways for art to unravel the abstruse for the uninitiated is surely an important and certainly an under-exploited challenge.

Carl Djerassi's thoughtful new play makes some amends. *An Immaculate Misconception* is a fictional account of the first successful fertilisation of a human egg by the direct injection of a single sperm, a technique which has become the principal treatment for male infertility. It

An Immaculate Misconception New Theatre NW3

does not shirk the science, but sneaks it out in easily ingestible gobbets. Projected films of actual fertilisations help to bring the process to life — and are enthralling enough to all but overshadow the rest of the play.

Djerassi, who has adapted his own novel, certainly writes with authority: he was the man who invented the Pill. But his narrative focuses mainly on the human drama behind the discovery. Reproductive biologist Melanie, the imaginary pioneer, is a childless thirtysomething widow involved with a functionally infertile married man. She se-

cretly makes away with some of his sperm and injects it into her own eggs, to the indignation of her ambitious colleague, Felix. Seeing the prospect of his future fame wriggling away with the uncooperative sperm, Felix adds his own — highly personal — contribution to the mix.

Djerassi mostly maintains interest in his characters' anxieties and affections, while at the same time raising through them a host of intriguing issues about medical ethics, parenthood and the rights of the child. He is much helped by Gordon Greenberg's assured direction and Jonathan Farnson's design, which smoothly sets up all gradations from the intimate to the clinical.

There are two strong and well-judged performances from Susannah Fellows as Melanie and Stephen Greif as the unsuspecting donor, Michael Matus, although convincingly slimy as Felix, gabbles some of his lines, and his character's motives are under-defined.

The script is at fault here; it also lands Toni Palmer with a rather superfluous part as a counsellor from a sperm bank, although she gets the right mix of the motherly and the slightly seedy. That aside, this is a welcome and successful experiment.

NIGEL CLIFF

Offering glimpses of five people living along the Finchley Road, *Snake* is not something they see slithering towards Swiss Cottage but how Rona Munro, the author, sees their stories — a snake with its tail in its mouth: no certain beginning, no evident end.

The play can begin at any one of its four scenes, after which the others follow in sequence: thus each of the four scenes is sometimes the last to be performed, sending the audience away in a different mood. The performance I saw began with two discontented women on the balcony of their tower block and a neighbour, obsessed with one of them,

This is where we came in

Snake Hampstead NW3

who leaves the tooth he has lost in a fight with her man as a love token outside her door.

In scene two he is pursuing the bird that mistook the tooth for a breadcrumb and swal-

lowed it. The troubled son of the woman he loves bashes him with a baseball bat. Next the boy is seen in the local police station, refusing to speak to his mother until a minicab driver advises her to alter her attitude.

Finally the driver calls at a club to take the other woman back to her flat, and we learn why her eyes were gummed to-

gether at the start of the tower block scene. We are back where we started, and so presumably are the characters, although if the play had begun at this club scene and ended with mother and son together, the mood might have been more hopeful.

The technical interest is considerable, and the alternative patterns exercise the mind afterwards, hope, entrapment, violence and farce being the choices these characters face. What one viewing cannot tell is whether the performances change for a different sequence, and raise doubts about the likelihood of successfully playing against the text. Until she placed salted liver over her closed eyes (a magic trick, apparently) I could not relate Lindsey Coulson's assured Ruby to the moaning witter of the tower block scene.

There is a firmer coherence to the other four, but always a sense that the characters are being made to jump to the author's bidding and make her points about motherhood, fatherhood and the like. Although the direction by Gemma Bodinetz is packed with energetic details, it does not dispel this awkward artificiality.

That said, Terence Maynard delivers his speech on frustrated parenthood with a fierce intensity, and Fiona Bell's peaky Chelle speaks of the boringness of poverty and, elsewhere, of a mother's bond to her child with a conviction that tears at the heart.

JEREMY KINGSTON



NIGEL CLIFF

Terence Maynard and Lindsey Coulson in one of the scenes from the circular *Snake*

Starred honours

UNIVERSITY College Opera knows no fear, although you might have thought that even a group as ambitious as this one might have quailed before Tchaikovsky's *Mazeppa*, a great, sprawling epic as difficult to play as it is to sing. Thank heavens they didn't: the result was one of the most exciting university productions within living memory.

The work itself grows more impressive with each hearing, technically faultless in unfolding a story through music, and unfolding it with exceptional clarity: for all the brilliance of the orchestration, you can always hear the words. Torture, betrayal, a ranting good public execution, doomed erotic obsession... it could almost be by Puccini. But for all the violence on the surface what strikes home is the stream of unforced, tender lyricism. The final scene, with the crazed heroine singing the sweetest of

OPERA

lullabies over her dying lover, is one of the most shattering in 19th-century opera.

In the cold light of day, the writing is probably beyond the UCL Orchestra, but the spirit and commitment of their playing under David Drummond swept that detail aside.

The producer-designer Netia Davan Wetton staged the action in a non-specific, vaguely constructivist 20th century, although *Mazeppa* sported Trotsky's beard and Stalin's moustache. Her handling of a lusty chorus of more than 80 on the Bloomsbury's small stage was impressive.

Andrew Slater (Kochubey) led the cast in enunciating the anonymous translation with meaningful clarity; this wonderfully written role of the outraged father nearly upstages that of the eponymous Ukrainian traitor-tyrant, as whom Peter Snipp was audibly struggling with an unannounced indisposition. The menial soprano Rachel Nicholls was tested by some of Maria's big numbers, but rightly saved her best for the closing lullaby-duet, and the same was true of Julian Jensen as her tenor lover. Miriam Murphy was splendidly firm and spirited as her haughty mother.

RODNEY MILNES

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Mephistopheles

Boito



GREAT BRITISH HOPES

Rising stars in the arts firmament

REBECCA CLARKE

Age: 24.

Profession: Actress.

Don't act your age: Last December she collected excellent reviews as nine-year-old Lucy Pevensie in the RSC's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which has just transferred to the Barbican from Stratford.

How do you go about playing a middle-class 1930s child? "You put on a clipped, Hayley Mills-type voice, avoid being twee, and concentrate on the honesty and strength that C.S. Lewis gave Lucy. We did a lot of improvisation around a child's fear of being taken away from their parents, or becoming lost."

Animal instincts: Along with Emily

Pithon, who plays Susan, the elder Pevensie daughter, she went on a research trip to London Zoo. "We wanted to watch how children interact with animals, as that's a big element of what we do in the play. Kids have tremendous energy and are quite fearless around wild animals. Their instinct is to touch them."

Suddenly everybody's a critic: "It's amazing how excited children become during the show and I've had some great letters from them. But a few of them make comments like: 'I think the lighting in that scene near the end should have been different.'"

Forever young? Her biggest TV part to date came in 1997, playing "a rebellious 17-year-old" who causes trouble for her uncle, a vicar, in the BBC1 chil-

dren's sitcom *Out of Tune*. "I can't help looking very young. I still occasionally get asked for ID in pubs, and the day I'm cast as a character my own age I'll be cheering."

Who turned her on to acting? "Chris Walker, my amazing drama teacher at secondary school in Shropshire. She was like a second mother and a best friend. We're still very close."

Troubled training: "I had very mixed experiences at the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts in London. I considered leaving the course early, after the second year. But I forced myself to knuckle down and make the most of it."

Stick to what you know: "I haven't done much TV, or any film, but I'm pretty sure that I'll always get the biggest buzz from theatre. I just prefer the process: you have time to go into things deeply and improve during the run of a play. With TV, you have to do everything much more quickly."

DANIEL ROSENTHAL



GALLERIES: Richard Cork admires two contemporary artists with designs on the human form

Power of a snake charmer

Sometimes, through an inspired union between a gallery and the work displayed there, art can be transformed by the location it inhabits. Just such an event can now be witnessed at the Tate Liverpool, where Richard Deacon is holding his most substantial British exhibition for a decade. Staged on the top floor, a recently opened space offering lofty and airy surroundings, this outstanding survey concentrates largely on unshown sculpture from the 1990s.

I cannot imagine a more sympathetic setting. Large warehouse windows offer beguiling views on to the docks, and provide an ideal context for understanding Deacon's approach. For he operates as a fabricator rather than a modeller or carver, constructing his sculpture with a vigour akin to the shipbuilders who once supplied Liverpool with seaworthy vessels.

The show starts quietly, admitting us to a central chamber lined with ribbed plastic sheets. Hanging from the ceiling, they contain a mass of wriggling, insect-like images, turbulent enough to explain why Deacon calls the series *The Interior's Always More Difficult*. He has been preoccupied with the body ever since his spectacular emergence in the early 1980s. But Deacon never approaches the human form in a literal way. Even at their most swollen and organic, his three-dimensional structures are made with a precision worthy of an engineer.

They also alter in unpredictable ways as we walk around them. On one side, *Almost Beautiful* presents a laminated wood surface, with spattered glue adding an all-over painterly texture. Move to the other side of the sculpture, though, and solidity gives way to transparent lightness: a skin of welded polycarbonate billows outwards, playfully contradicting the assertion of substance elsewhere.

Deacon has always been fascinated by the wealth of materials available to the contemporary sculptor. In the latest additions to his sequence of small works called *Art for Other People*, he moves with suppleness from oak to polyester resin, or from glass fibre to cardboard. More often than not, heterogeneous materials find themselves yoked together in a single, surprising object: one piece is made from steamed beech and aluminium, while another combines nylon net, linen thread and MDF. But we never feel that these unpredictable combinations are forced or arbitrary. They are all informed by

a feeling of sensuous engagement, and Deacon's eye for colour gives them a vivacity that many sculptors fail to command.

As well as reflecting a voracious involvement with language, his titles always enhance the meaning of the work he produces. *New World Order*, the name he has chosen for the entire show, neatly encapsulates the tension informing all his finest work. The surging optimism conveyed by "new world" is pitched against the uncompromising rigour of "order". Throughout the exhibition, Deacon's proliferating fertility is saved from incontinence by a sense of discipline. Even at his most relaxed and intimate, an underlying austerity is still discernible.

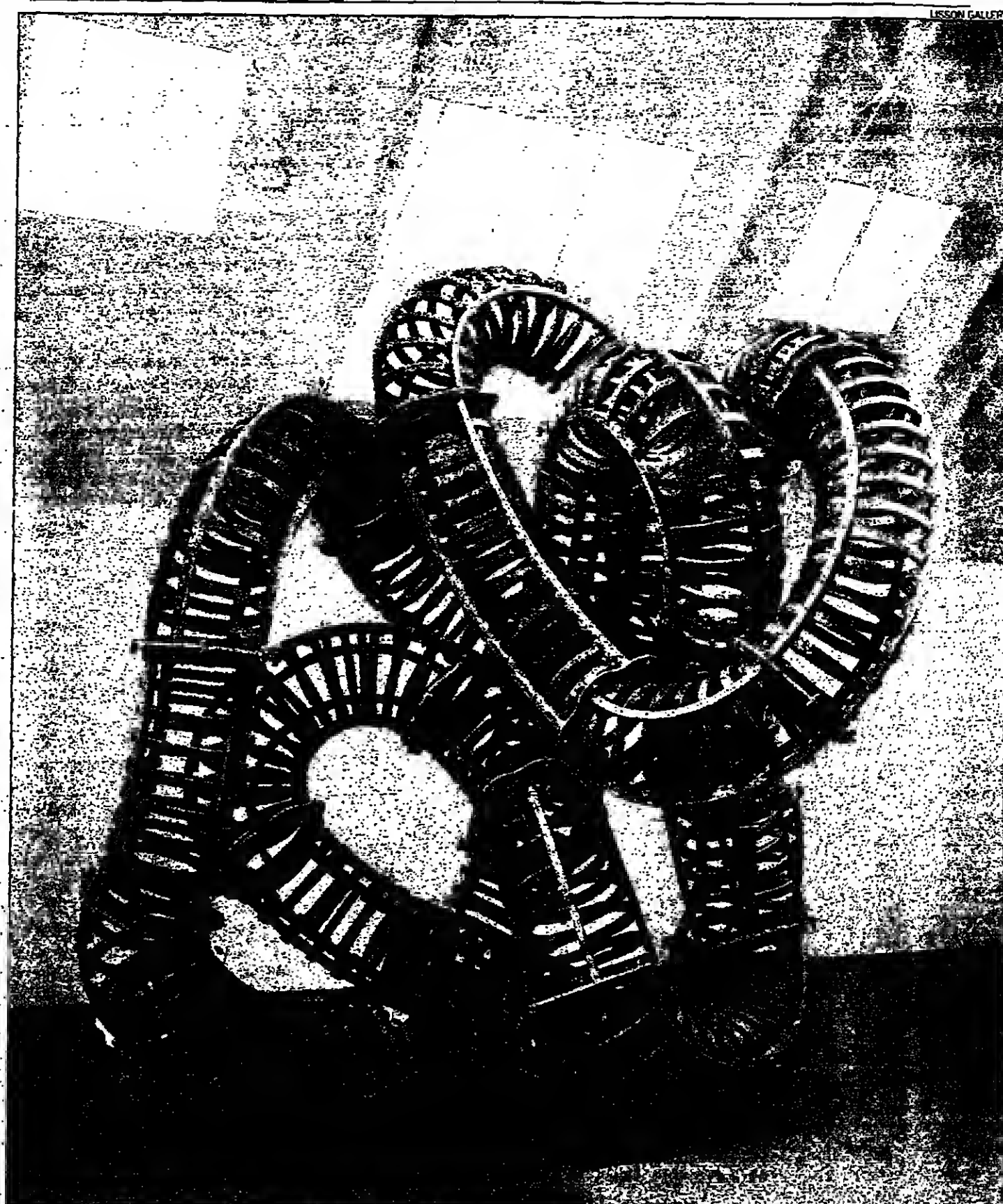
Deacon's ability to work on the grand scale becomes spectacularly clear in the final section. Monumental dimensions bring out the most exuberant side of his inventiveness, and the three large

"His structures are made with an engineer's precision"

works displayed here add up to a triumphant display of sculptural aplomb. But there is nothing tiresomely muscle-flexing about them. After unfolds in a roller-coaster series of writhing wooden loops. Undulating across the floor like a restless snake, it is nevertheless stiffened by a rigid metal spine running through the centre. The tension between the two elements is as rewarding as the conflict between freedom and containment in Deacon's great outdoor sculpture on the Warwick University campus.

At first, *What Could Make Me Feel This Way (A)* seems even more expansive and abandoned. The coils of bent wood, all glued and screwed with typical exactitude, have such an explosive impact that they threaten to burst out of the room confining them. The last time I saw this exhilarating sculpture, at Deacon's Harrogate exhibition six years ago, it was isolated in the hangar-like vastness of the Orange. Here, by contrast, it can be circumnavigated only close to. Perhaps that is why I became more aware of its internal order: this time, perhaps, too, it seemed calmer in comparison with the astonishing, convoluted flourish of *Laocoon*, a truly prodigious sculpture dominating the largest space.

Made in 1996, this eruptive work provides the show with a superb climax. Twisting and stretching its steamed beechwood limbs towards the skylights high above, *Laocoon* manages to be both mysterious and open. Standing near it, and gazing deep into its menacing complexities, I felt that the sculpture might easily engulf me like the serpent



Sculptural aplomb at the Tate Liverpool: the steamed beechwood limbs of Richard Deacon's *Laocoon* (1996) threaten to engulf visitors

crushing its victims in the classical *Laocoon* carving. At the same time, though, Deacon's expansive brio is enormously invigorating, the work of a 50-year-old sculptor whose spirit it is as irrepressible as ever.

A far darker vision runs through Tony Bevan's exhibition at the enterprising Abbot Hall Art Gallery in Kendal. Only two years younger than Deacon, Bevan emerged as an impressive young painter soon after leaving the Slade School of Art in 1976. The limpidly installed show at Kendal concentrates on recent work, but his preoccupations remain constant. The human figure is Bevan's theme, often marooned in a brooding blackness.

Many canvases focus on the head alone, and it stretches upwards in one of the most powerful images on view here. A fiercely elongated neck is exposed, scored with harsh lines suggestive of a surgical wound. But they could equally well signify a psychic injury, for the straining man appears to be afflicted by inner torment.

Bevan belongs to a distinguished British tradition in postwar figurative painting. His lonely, anguished people have much in common with Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud and Frank Auerbach. But he is far from derivative. A strong sense of a personal world is created in this relentless exhibition. Unsentimental to the point of bleakness, he never lets us forget the exist-

tential stress underpinned by the people inhabiting his large canvases. Charcoal is often deployed alongside pigment in these highly linear works, and on the most recent paintings it projects in angular, glistening lumps. The figures occupying these pictures seem stranded and alienated within an impersonal, metropolitan vastness. Mostly, they stay inside the self-imposed limits of a bare room. In the only paintings that stray beyond these limits, he traps us in corridors receding remorselessly into the distance.

Against all the odds, though, this exhibition is far from depressing. Bevan works with admirable confidence and assurance, never overloading his images with an excess of anxiety. Bevan knows how to con-

vey ambiguity of feeling, nowhere more commandingly than in a large painting called *Horizon*. Red pigment extends in a thick band across the bottom of the canvas. It looks like a sea of blood, and seems to threaten the two macabre heads floating above. Glazed in expression and almost sightless, they flounder there like swimmers in danger of drowning. But despite everything inflicted on them in Bevan's turbulent art, they remain resilient. Over and above his exploration of suffering and loneliness, he ends up affirming the fundamental will to survive.

Richard Deacon is at the Tate Liverpool (0151-709 0807) until May 16; Tony Bevan is at Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal (01539 723660) until April 11.

AROUND THE GALLERIES

ABOUT 25 years ago a teenage boy accosted Bob Marley outside a London club. The reggae singer was almost unknown in Britain at the time, but the 14-year-old knew his music because his West Indian parents played it at home. "Hey, you talk funny," he said to Marley. "So do you," the musician replied. He had never come across a black person with a London accent before.

A friendship was born of this encounter and it is this which shows most clearly in Dennis Morris's current photographic show. From that day, when he bunked off school to accompany Marley on tour, through the 1970s when the Wailers returned to Britain, this 6me as stars, Morris has toured with the band. His photographs have all the sharpness and spontaneity of reportage. But most salient is the sense of intimacy which comes across, the relaxed humour and gentle ease of friends.

Proud Galleries, 5 Buckingham St, WC2 (0171-839 4942) until April 30

Ken Currie translates raw and painful realities into ethereal images that haunt the consciousness. A photograph of a fatally wounded child inspires a series of spectral portraits articulating the grief of the parent. Bruised faces and swaddled forms float across canvases. Mouths stretch open, and eye-sockets bleed darkness. Decrepit old men crouching over their flags in a hostel inspire frail figure studies. A series of three paintings portray, in almost forensic detail, the damage which can be done to a face. There is an eerie atmosphere to this show, the calm insistence of a pain which refuses to dissolve into consolation. Boukamel Contemporary Art, 9 Cork St, W1 (0171-734 6444) until April 24

FROM an archive of hundreds of thousands of photographs by Terence Donovan, *The Eye That Never Sleeps* extracts a manageable selection of those considered to represent the changing face of London over the past four decades. When this is not the face of fame — of artists, actors, authors and aristocrats — it is, on the whole, a smart, streetwise, fashionable face. It knows it is being watched through the photographer's lens and composes itself accordingly.

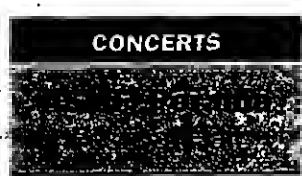
But beyond the immaculate make-up, the tailored poses, an edge of self-awareness gleams. Is Donovan mocking the dark and deadly serious women in silly hats? At the beginning of the show, alongside a portrait of the artist, a row of gap-toothed East End kids are shown doubled up with giggles at the sight of the mannequin who poses behind them, tottering on her kitten heels. Museum of London, 150 London Wall, EC2 (0171-600 3699) until Aug 1

RACHEL CAMPBELL-JOHNSTON

Politely perfect

Thirty years ago, Mozart's C major Piano Concerto, K467, usually arrived saddled with the tag *Elvira Madigan*, after a once-revered Swedish film that spawned its slow movement over a horrible soft-focus romance. In 1980 Denis Matthews wrote on an LP sleeve-note: "The slow movement has acquired an independent fame," but sniffily declined to give details. Now it is as though the film never existed. No mention anywhere.

Only Mozart remains; and with Murray Perahia directing the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields from the keyboard, that is all anyone should need. The Academy's muted violins and plucked double basses were born to play that movement's opening, and they spun out its cantabile line with gossamer delicacy. Then Perahia stole in, twinkling like a star in the night sky. Both here and in the B-flat concerto, K595, he rightly made the tender slow movements the performance's focal point: this was, after all, a concert in Sir William Glock's Mozart series "From the Heart". And he made the most — indeed almost too



CONCERTS

much — of the minor key passages elsewhere, dark clouds invading sunshine. Perhaps Perahia was simply relishing a chance to play unhampered, without the need to stand up, conduct the players' circled around, and flip his tailcoat back over the stool in time for the piano's next entry. What of the music's other phases? The last movement of K467 was a whirlwind of vigour and joy, fingers dancing up the keyboard. The same spirit radiated through K595's finale, with its rondo theme fit for a nursery rhyme. Through-out, the orchestra was in near-perfect shone; though the platform arrangement left the timpanist marooned in his contributions to K467, especially the allegro maestoso.

For all these delights, you can have too much politeness in a single concert. How pleasant, then, to wel-



Keyboard conductor: pianist Murray Perahia

come the flawed *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore*, K339, performed with the Academy Chorus under its conductor Laszlo Heltay.

Unlike a mass setting, vespers need not aspire to unity; and Mozart's *Solemn Vespers* are truly higgledy-piggledy pieces, in assorted keys. In a concert performance this can be disconcerting, but the buoyant, clear tone of the Academy Choir brought its own unity. The soprano Inger Dam-Jensen proved lacklustre in the Vespers' hit number, *Laudate Dominum*; and the three other soloists were little more than a back-up group.

GEOFF BROWN

Word had got around. The eldest player was just 21; they had already performed halfway round the world, collected an armful of competition prizes, made their first disc. There was standing room only at Saturday's recital by the young Jerusalem Quartet, founded six years ago and now giving its first full programme at the Wigmore Hall as part of the Young Masters series.

And what a programme it was: from Haydn's *Sunrise* to Shostakovich's sunset and on, still further, to Beethoven's Op 130 String Quartet with the Grose Fuge. The sheer imaginative virtuosity of Haydn's opening of his Quartet Op 76

If one young soloist wants to play Copland's *Clarinet Concerto* and the other wants to sing Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* there is a problem. How do you integrate those two works into a programme that adds up to a concert? Whatever the answer, it is certainly not to begin with Mendelssohn's *Hebrides* Overture, to stick Mozart's *Salzburg Divertimento* in D in the middle and to end with Dvorak's *Scherzo Capriccioso*. Feeble response to a professional challenge though it was, that programme did at least fulfil its primary function in providing a showcase for the two soloists chosen as the latest beneficiaries of Akzo Nobel's sponsorship of promising young musicians. Work-

Young superstars

Jerusalem Quartet

Wigmore Hall

emerged as if through spontaneous reactions from second to second.

The players' own Russian roots seemed to draw nourishment from the central Shostakovich Quartet, No 8 in C minor, Op 110. This is the composer composing himself, no less: his own DSCH monogram is all-pervasive; and a

dark web of self-quotation draws the receptive listener deep into his innermost psyche. The Jerusalem Quartet, aware of the work's weight, paced themselves carefully.

They could, perhaps, have torn still more savagely at the monogram motif in the *molto*. But their sharp-eyed, deft-fingered augmentation and diminution of that motif as the work progressed created a crazed hall of mirrors in which Shostakovich's name and his very self were refracted and revealed. The compos-

er was apparently deeply moved by an early private performance of the work by the Borodin Quartet: there are signs of a comparable depth of perception here, a burgeoning sense of similarly great things to come already in this young quartet's playing.

That sense was confirmed by the Beethoven. Yet another visionary opening, understood and recreated as such, a most thoughtfully paced first movement: a wide-eyed Cavatina, still awaiting the gravitas of maturity; and a final *Grosse Fuge* whose palpable physical struggle only reinforced the spiritual one at its heart.

HILARY FINCH

Slipshod spotlight

ing with David Zinman and the Philharmonia before a big audience in Birmingham Symphony Hall must have been a valuable experience for both of them but particularly perhaps for Guang Yang who, although she won the Cardiff Singer of the World competition two years ago, has more to gain from this kind of exposure. The Swedish clarinetist Martin Fröst is already a highly accomplished concerto soloist. The Chinese mezzo might now be wondering why she chose a Mahler cycle that so clearly exposes the weakness

of her bottom register. Remarkably sure in pitch, conscientious in her German pronunciation, she was nonetheless out of place in this particular score. The one worrying aspect of Fröst's performance of Copland's *Clarinet Concerto* was his choreography. His tendency to move about as he played brought him perilously close to the violinist behind him who, had she not shrunk further and further away, might well have found him in her lap. If Fröst's performance had been any less compelling — above all in its con-

trol over line and colour in the first movement and its technical and idiomatic brilliance in the second — the temptation to ask him to look where he was going might have been irresistible. With a conductor as masterful as Zinman and a need for something like Schubert's *Symphony in D minor* before the Mahler and, say, a Stravinsky ballet score after the Copland, it was frustrating to hear the Philharmonia pursuing a different agenda in Mendelssohn and Dvorak, attractively though they performed it. As for the Mozart, it was as inexplicable in its presence as they were professional in its execution.

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ARTS

DANCE

Transatlantic letdown

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Not worth the trip

RECOMMENDED TODAY

Guide to arts and entertainment compiled by Marti Hargie

LONDON

GOD: Jason Orange (ex-Talk That) and Tom Hayes, with Spike as DJ, star in Jim Kinnear's punk-rock, anarchic attack on high culture, *King's Head* (0171-226 1918). Opens tonight, 7.30pm. (S)

CHAMBER ORCHESTRA OF EUROPE: Piano virtuoso Martin Argentin joins this fine collection of European musicians for Chopin's First Piano Concerto and Emmanuel Levin conducts a programme which also includes Faure and Beethoven. Barbican (0171-536 8591). Tonight, 7.30pm. (S)

SONG RECITAL: Rising young American baritone Nathan Gunn offers an evening of Schubert Lieder followed by American songs by Ives, Rosen, Bolcom and Gene Scherer. With Kevin Murphy on the piano. Wigmore Hall (0171-935 5141). Tonight, 7.30pm. (S)

ELSEWHERE

LIVERPOOL: Seattle Symphony conductor Gerard Schwarz leads the Royal Liverpool Orchestra and Chorus in a performance of Elgar's powerful *The Dream of Gerontius*. With soloists Penelope Walker, Anir, Davies and Stephen Roberts. Philharmonic Hall (0151-709 3789). Tonight, 7.30pm. (S)

MANCHESTER: Soprano Catherine Bott and her four co-soloists get into 18th-century gear for this authentic period piece as they join the Manchester Festival Orchestra and Chorus for an evocative candle-lit performance of Mozart's Handel's oratorio *Masopolska* is directed from the keyboard by Christopher Moulds. Tonight, 7.30pm. (S)

NEW WEST END SHOWS

Jeremy Kingston's choice of theatre showing in London
 ■ House full, returns only ■ Some seats available ■ Seats at all prices

■ **GOOD:** C.P. Taylor's best play, tracing a liberal professor's gradual descent into working with the Nazis. Charles Dance heads a strong cast. Michael Grandage directs. Donmar (0171-369 1729). (S)

■ **TROILUS AND CRESSIDA:** Trevor Nunn and John Caird direct black Trojans and white Greeks, with Peter de Jersey and Sophie Okonedo as the doomed lovers. Olivier (0171-452 3000). (S)

■ **GROSS INDECENCY:** The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde. Michael Pennington plays Wilde, with William Heyland and Clive Francis as counsel for and against, in Michael Koolman's play. Gielgud (0171-494 5085).

■ **A LOVELY SUNDAY FOR CREVE COEUR:** Late Tennessee Williams play where four thirtysomething women do and don't want to go for a lakeside picnic. Jersey Street Studios for Gracie Theatre. Drift Hall (0171-637 8270).

■ **SNAKE:** Interesting play by Rona Munro, snaking round the ropes.

FILMS ON GENERAL RELEASE

James Christopher's choice of the latest movies

NEW RELEASES

ARLINGTON ROAD (15): Never shunning thriller with a magnificent performance by Jeff Bridges as a paranoid professor who believes his neighbours, Tim Robbins, is watching a terrorised comedy. Mark Pellington directs.

WAKING NED (PG): It's *Lolita* *Calverley* for a small village in this quirky Irish tale about a corpse in charge of a winning lottery ticket. With Ian Bannen and David Kelly. Kirk Jones directs.

SEUL COMTE TOURS (I STANO ALONE) (15): Droll, surreal, and moving voyage through a French butcher's life. Philippe Marion puts in a monumental performance as Casper Nor's ghastly, nihilistic experiment.

A NIGHT AT THE ROXBURY (15): Will Ferrell and Chris Kattan, aka the Bush brothers, are routinely kicked in the groin by gobs with big cleavages. Awful nightclub comedy from John Fortenberry.

SOUTHERN BELLS (15): Gipping documentary about Ireland's first travelling boxing champion, Francis Barron, who graduated from a caravan into the Atlanta Olympics. Liam McGraith directs.

CURRENT

PATCH ADAMS (12): Robin Williams stars as a brilliant but naive doctor who works with a world of laughter. Director Tom Sherry directs an obscure amount of TV soap. Great performance from Tony Danza. Jeff Daniels and Reese Witherspoon.

PLEASANTVILLE (12): Ingenious spoof of American family values. Two dysfunctional 1950s teenagers get stuck in a supposedly clean 1950s TV soap. Great performance from Tony Danza. Jeff Daniels and Reese Witherspoon.

BELOVED (15): Oprah Winfrey is supremely powerful as a runaway slave haunted by post-traumatic stress, and a dead daughter. Jonathan Demme's over-the-top film, however, to get inside the historical heart of Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize winner.

THE THIN RED LINE (15): A gripping cast of American soldiers lose their sanity in the South Pacific during the Second World War. Taronne Malick's artistic masterpiece stars Sean Penn, Jim Caviezel, Ben Chaplin, Nick Nolte.

YOU'VE GOT MAIL (PG): Bullet-proof romantic blockbuster with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan who fall in love on the Internet. Written and directed by Nora Ephron.

MUSIC:
Martin Neary
tells Richard
Morrison about
life after
Westminster

It isn't exactly central to his repertoire, but Martin Neary has surely drawn inspiration during these past few traumatic months from the old Jerome Kern song: "Pick yourself up, dust yourself down, start all over again." Exactly a year ago he was suspended from his job, the grandest in all musical Christendom. He was organist of Westminster Abbey, a post once held by Henry Purcell. He had maintained an immaculate choral tradition. He had masterminded brilliant aural backdrops to majestic ceremonies, most famously the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales. And, as a notable champion of modern British composers such as Jonathan Harvey and John Tavener, he had done much to ensure that the Anglican Church continued to have a living musical tradition.

All this counted for nothing when a new Dean, Wesley Carr, decided to make an issue of alleged financial irregularities in the relationship between the Nearys (Martin's wife, Penny, handled the choir paperwork) and the abbey. The dispute was bitter, protracted and horribly public: a dire advertisement for the Church's professed belief in forgiveness and humility. Its conclusion, following a convoluted ruling by a High Court judge, was crushing. Neary, a cathedral organist for more than 30 years, was ignominiously ejected from the world he loved.

Many in the Church felt that, whatever the murky facts, this was a disgraceful way to treat one of Anglican music's most diligent and loyal servants. How on earth did this mild man survive, let alone bounce back with the vigour of a boxer stung by a blow below the belt? "I don't see how anybody could have gone through that process without feeling hurt," Neary says. "But we have been sustained, first, because we have faith — faith in our faith, and faith in ourselves — and secondly because we have had amazing, unrelenting support, day in and day out. We feel incredibly humbled by it. Only the other day I had a card from a cricket-loving friend who said: 'Whenever I see the third umpire making a nonsense of a decision, I think of your experience.' Joan Rodriguez, Ian Bostridge, Paul Daniel and Julius Drake are even putting on a benefit concert for us, on May 9 at the Barbican. I'm very touched that such stars feel so strongly."



Martin Neary with his wife, Penny, at the height of last year's bitter public dispute with the Dean of Westminster Abbey

Perhaps the most distressing moment came when the Nearys had to quit the abbey organist's traditional house, in the Cloisters. "We'd done 16 years at Winchester Cathedral and more than a decade at the abbey, so we'd been members of closed communities for a long time. Luckily we had bought a place in Fulham, knowing that the time would eventually come when we would need it. We didn't anticipate it would be quite so soon."

Remarkably, Neary believes that good may yet come out of the sorry mess. "As a result of the most unwelcome publicity the whole matter of security of tenure for cathedral musicians may well be improved," he thinks. He also says that he harbours no bitterness towards the abbey. "I was blessed with the privilege of working there for 11 years, and obviously if things had gone differ-

ently I'd have stayed there for another six or seven. We will never say anything to put down the abbey."

Even so, it is with some relish that Neary lists the work he has been offered since leaving Westminster. The inference is clear. If he was untrusting, as the abbey charged, he would be shunned by the rest of the Church and the music profession. But the reverse appears to be true. "I have been asked by the Royal School of Church Music to be a consultant for its new Millennium Youth Choir, which is very much the initiative of the Archbishop of Canterbury," Neary says. "I'm flattered and honoured that he should want me involved. I'm also doing lots of organ recitals this summer, then I'm off to Australia to work with the Australian Youth Choir."

And Neary is also in de-

mand to conduct the modern English music with which he is so much associated. Tomorrow, for instance, he steers Sinfonia 21 and the BBC Singers through one of the most striking pieces of sacred music written since 1945: Jonathan Harvey's "church opera" *Passion and Resurrection*, which Neary commissioned and premiered when he was at Winchester in 1981.

The piece, says Neary, had originally been intended for Canterbury, "but the more they heard about it the more alarmed they got. It's certainly not your average choral society passion. There are an awful lot of difficult things for the performers. But the work also has wonderful lyricism and power. Indeed, for all its avant-garde moments, the Resurrection part has a Verdi-

like flamboyance. I think it's Jonathan's most approachable piece."

Neary maintains that he is now having a "fantastic time" conducting such events: concerts that might never have come his way if he had stayed at Westminster. But ask him whether he will ever go back into cathedral life — even after the demeaning events of last year — and his eyes light up. "I think it's highly probable, yes. Some things about cathedral life I miss enormously: the very special rapport with the choristers, for instance. So I'm keeping all options open."

Meanwhile, if it isn't too blasphemous a thought, conducting a piece called *Passion and Resurrection* seems an appropriate way to close the book on the worst year of his life.

● *Passion and Resurrection* is at St John's, Smith Square (0171-222 1061), tomorrow at 7.30pm

This is the third year that Woking has hosted its international dance festival and the lineup is usually impressive. But the festival's main foreign draw this time around has been a big letdown: Doug Varone and Dancers, a New York-based company which gave two performances at the New Victoria Theatre at the end of a fortnight's residency in Woking.

Varone and his ensemble have been kicking around for years. They are currently celebrating their thirteenth season with performances in America, Europe and Asia. The programme they brought to Woking Dance Umbrella last week offered three pieces choreographed by Varone in the 1990s. What do they tell us about this durable American? That he likes good music. And that he makes bad dances.



Doug Varone

Let's Dance, set to a wonderful selection of classic swing era recordings from Benny Goodman to Rosemary Clooney, is the kind of piece that wants to let you know it's having a good time up there on stage. The ensemble, who come in a pleasing variety of shapes and sizes, are full of bounce, making merry in what could be a spontaneous dance-fest by a party of teenagers who have just discovered their parents' jazz collection. But so unstructured and unfocused is the energetic choreography that it feels as if the dancers are making it up as they go along — and that they are fast running out of ideas.

Rise (1993) is apparently regarded as Varone's "breakthrough piece". What a surprise. As other choreographers have already proved, John Adams's *Fearful Symmetries* can really excite a stage. Varone, however, ignores the rousing rhythms in Adams's driven score. Instead of imaginative interplay with the music he opts for a kind of mechanical accompaniment, leaving his eight dancers to spin and dip through the shapeless sponges of his impoverished physical language.

Larking about to opera is something of a dance cliché, although with wit and intelligence it can be made to work. Varone's *Bel Canto*, set to the well-decorated sounds of Bellini's opera *Norma*, is an attempt at ballet parody that falls flat on its silly mugging faces. Worst of all is the all-male pas de deux for Larry Hahn and Varone himself, which comes across as little more than a nauseatingly cutesy display of camp histrionics.

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WEIGHTLIFTING

Supple's name cleared in drugs appeal

By JOHN GOODBODY

A BRITISH weightlifting champion is considering legal action after being cleared of an alleged drugs offence that caused him to be suspended from sport for seven months and thereby miss the 1998 Commonwealth Games.

Paul Supple, from Manchester, who would have been among the favourites for the under-94kg gold medal in Kuala Lumpur, has struggled to clear his name with money raised by his Wythenshawe club-mates.

Supple recorded a testosterone/epitestosterone (T/E) ratio above 6:1 in an out-of-competition test last August and was then left out of the England team for the Games. This adverse finding indicated that a doping offence may have been committed, but Supple's solicitors said further investigations would have to take place before a positive result could be declared. An appeals panel of the British Amateur Weightlifters Association (BAWLA) has now ruled that it could not be satisfied that an offence had been committed since there was no evidence that the investigations and/or an examination had been carried out.

Supple had always said that he had never taken drugs. His solicitor, Fraser Reid, of Russell Jones Walker, said yesterday: "There were several plausible reasons which we would have put forward to explain the T/E ratio. Paul has a naturally low testosterone level. He had also drunk two pints of beer to give the urine sample and this may well have increased his testosterone level."

The taking of testosterone, the male hormone, which helps to build muscle weight and aids recovery, is outlawed under guidelines of the medical committee of the International Olympic Committee.

However, there is controversy over the ratio. In 1995, Diane Modahl, the former Commonwealth 800 metres champion, successfully argued that degradation of her sample had increased the amount of testosterone, while Mary Slaney, the American runner, is in the middle of a dispute with the athletics authorities over her high T/E reading.

The United Kingdom Sports Council, which oversaw the collection of samples, yesterday declined to comment until it had received official confirmation from BAWLA.

Two months after Dougie Walker, the European 200 metres champion, was revealed to have failed a drugs test, a panel sat yesterday to determine whether he has a case to answer. A spokesperson for UK Athletics, the governing body of the sport in Britain, said it would announce the decision as soon as it had been communicated to Walker, who denies taking a banned drug.

Matt Dickinson finds the Tottenham midfield player in combative mood

Sherwood takes to national stage

Tim Sherwood declined to criticise Glenn Hoddle yesterday, perhaps aware that he had already used his best line. "The only way I'll ever get noticed," Sherwood once said, "is if I turn up and juggle the ball in his back garden."

Kevin Keegan needed no back-yard auditions to select the 30-year-old and now, rather unexpectedly, the Tottenham Hotspur player is contemplating the increasing likelihood of a first cap. With Batty and Ince unavailable through illness and suspension, the England coach is in need of a robust midfield player and Sherwood has never required a call to arms from his country to put his boot in where it hurts.

For such an important match, it would be a daunting elevation for one of only two uncapped players in the squad, Ray Parlour being the other. Sherwood has been called up only once before, by Terry Venables in February 1995 against Ireland in Dublin, but any hopes of coming off the bench disappeared amid a hail of missiles. The match was abandoned and so, in Sherwood's mind, was any hope of an international career.

"I've not looked at any of the squads for ages and I didn't look this time," he said. "I built myself up so many times before and it never happened so it got to the stage where I didn't want to get upset about it. I am in the squad now but I honestly have not thought about playing yet."

Sherwood's case may be helped by Keegan's equivocal comments yesterday on David Beckham's best position. Like most observers, the England coach believes that the Manchester United player



Sherwood is looking forward to making up for lost time should Keegan select him against Poland on Saturday

will eventually hold centre stage, but he hinted that Europe's best crosser, as Alex Ferguson described Beckham recently, may be asked to slice apart Poland from wide right.

"I think at some point in the future he should be more involved in the middle of midfield," Keegan said. "May-

be in the future he should be more central, but he is in such good form wide for United that he could play anywhere."

Either way, Sherwood has an above-evens chance of starting because none of his rivals — Paul Scholes, Jamie Redknapp, Parlour, Darren Anderton, who has yet to train

this week because of a groin injury — are natural holding midfield players. And surely not even the famously cavalier Keegan will start the match without one of those.

In the case of Parlour and Sherwood, Keegan must decide whether to risk one, or even two, non-capped players

in a European championship qualifier of such huge import, but he made positive noises about the pair yesterday, as he did about everyone, even the press.

"It would be nice for someone playing their first game in midfield to look alongside them and see somebody with

Brown relies on change

By KEVIN MCCARRA

SCOTLAND are reluctant adventurers, forced to set off into unknown territory. The misgivings about unfamiliar surroundings are obvious. Faced with a squad that lacks many of the established names, supporters have been slow to buy tickets for the European championship qualifying match against Bosnia-Herzegovina at Ibrox on Saturday, even if the box office will be brisker for the visit of the Czech Republic to Celtic Park next Wednesday.

Change was inevitable, given that Scotland took an ageing squad to the World Cup finals. Colin Hendry, a mainstay of the side, is injured, but the Rangers centre half has confirmed that he will retire from international football next year. If Craig Brown, the Scotland manager, always knew that he would need to undertake some reconstruction, the process is not entirely within his control.

The retirement of Jim Leighton and the injuries to Hendry, John Collins and Kevin Gallacher have stripped worldliness from every area of

the team. "When we were sending our good, experienced pros," Brown said, "we knew that no one could give them a hard time. Now, we don't quite know what we will get, but we do have talented young players who can grow up quickly."

Players such as Allan Johnston, of Sunderland, and Calum Davidson, of Blackburn Rovers, have already earned caps, but instead of indulging

them, Scotland may soon have to depend on them. Brown notes Niall Quinn's regular goal-scoring in the Nationwide League first division, ascribes it to the service that Johnston provides and goes on to hope that the winger's fast, flat crosses will sustain Scotland against a hulking Bosnia defence.

Peter Phillips, the Rangers' midfielder, has withdrawn from the squad with a groin strain that has proved chronic. A further visit to a specialist is required and he may not play in many of Rangers' remaining games this season.

Where Scotland are concerned, there might not have been much scope, in any case, for coltishness in midfield. It is the one department in which Brown is well served.

He insists on being celebratory about Gary McAllister, 34, who is returning to international action after a serious knee injury. "He is one of the most outstanding midfield players in the Premiership," Brown said, demonstrating that he still prizes his remaining veterans.



Hendry: mainstay

Luton call in receivers

LUTON TOWN, former winners of the League Cup and owners of a plastic pitch, yesterday followed such famous names as Portsmouth, Crystal Palace and Millwall into the hands of waiting accountants when the club was placed in receivership.

Peter Phillips and John Kelly, of Bucher Phillips — the firm which is also to be made administrators of Palace — were put in charge last night, just before the Nationwide League second division game with Reading. The move followed the decision by Cliff Bassett, a local businessman, to call in a £2.1 million loan to the club.

Graham Stuart, 28, the former Chelsea, Everton and England Under-21 forward, yesterday became Charlton Athletic's record signing when he completed a £1.1 million move from Sheffield United.

Everton hope to complete the signing of Kevin Campbell, the former Arsenal

FOOTBALL IN BRIEF

and Nottingham Forest forward, on loan from Trabzonspor, of Turkey, today.

Liverpool will complete the signing of Erik Meijer, the 29-year-old Bayer Leverkusen forward, on a free transfer under the Bosman ruling in the summer.

Colin Calderwood, the Scotland defender, yesterday moved from Tottenham Hotspur to Aston Villa for £225,000 on a contract until the end of next season.

Jim Smith, the Derby County manager, has failed in an attempt to sign Seth Johnson, the 20-year-old Crewe Alexandra midfielder, before the transfer deadline tomorrow but may try again in the summer.

Dundee have allowed Iain Anderson, their Scotland Under-21 winger, to join Chelsea for trials this week in a move that could lead to a permanent move to Stamford Bridge.



Campbell: Everton-bound

FOR THE RECORD

BASKETBALL

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION (NBA): Indiana 90 Washington 86, New Jersey 106 Toronto 87, New York 71 Atlanta 80, Dallas 83 Los Angeles Lakers 84, Houston 110 Sacramento 100, Milwaukee 115 Detroit 86, Phoenix 89 Vancouver 84, Seattle 92 Philadelphia 76.

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Pandering to public bloodlust

I don't know what it is that England managers get up to in their past lives, but it must be pretty bad. Certainly the punishment that has been handed out to them during their present journeys across the Vale of Maya could only fit some truly dreadful crimes. They can't all have been Nero, can they?

A BBC flyer roosting on the doormat told me that tonight, the past four England football managers/coaches will "hit back at the press for turning

the teachers and — glory! — the teachers could not hit back. This programme follows the same format.

It is a golden opportunity for a good old whinge in front of a wholly sympathetic audience. Everybody hates the press, as libel lawyers will tell you with untrammelled glee. It doesn't stop them reading newspapers, but "hating the press" is seen now as an ineluctable aspect of the human condition.

My first reaction is to dismiss it all with an airy wave of the hand and to make a remark about heat and kitchens. Partly this is trade union solidarity with fellow scribers and turnip-makers, partly it is an impatience with the lack of logical thought behind most of the anti-press whinges. If you order a vindaloo, don't whinge to the waiter about your curry being too spicy.

No doubt we shall hear that the nature of the criticism aimed at England managers is unfair to their families. Well, that is fair for you: if you don't want to be famous, it is best not to enter public life. And — contrary to the belief of every would-be famous person — you don't get fame on your own terms.

Teachers could not hit back

A BBC flyer roosting on the doormat told me that tonight, the past four England football managers/coaches will "hit back at the press for turning

SIMON BARNES



Midweek View

But then I think of some of the deliberately wounding attacks on England managers and, to be fair, some of it really is not fair.

Robson is the most obvious example of unfairness. He made a pretty good fist of the job, World Cup quarter-finalist in 1986, semi-finalist in 1990. But he was pursued with extraordinary relentlessness.

The Sun's headline after a disappointing result against Saudi Arabia — In The Name Of Allah, Go! — is merely the most memorable example. Robson did all right but, under the pressures of the job, he aged visibly before the eyes

of the nation. He continues in football management to this day, a decent football manager and a decent man.

Taylor is another decent and very likeable man. Certainly the job was too much for him. And there is no ducking the genius of The Sun's headline that greeted his team's defeat by Sweden — Swedes 2 Turnips 1. But did Taylor really deserve the personal abuse, the personal mocking?

Venables always managed to get a good, not to say slavish press — at least, on the football side. The harder-nosed news reporters

perhaps I mean — eye on his business dealings. No one weeps for Venables there. True, plenty of other people have been involved in similar business deals without getting so much media coverage. But being a famous footballing man and a businessman is a tough double to bring off, and Venables didn't make it.

Hodde is the author of his own demise. He told a reporter about his beliefs and was dismayed by the public response to them. He is inclined to see himself as a job martyr, hounded out of office by a vile press for beliefs

sincerely held. This was a bizarre episode, but it was the public response to Hodde's beliefs, not the reporting of them, that persuaded the Football Association to fire him.

But there is, in truth, something distasteful about the frenzy that occurs once the blood of an England manager can be smelt. Why, then, does it happen? Well, it wouldn't happen at all if it didn't sell papers and it wouldn't sell papers if people didn't want to read it.

Unreal expectations are the dominant fact of the England manager's life: he has to win every match, including the

World Cup final, or he is Letting Us Down. And the only England manager to win a World Cup final was sacked.

An England manager who has Let Us Down must pay the price. It is not the press that demands it, but the public, for the press, as a rule, articulates rather than creates the national mood. The public hounding of England football managers is distasteful, irrational and unfair. But if it didn't satisfy an incontinent public need, it wouldn't happen. The press is just doing what it has always done — seeking to please the public.

Did Taylor deserve the abuse?

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TELEVISION CHOICE

In search of serpents

Deadly Rattlesnakes with Steve Irwin

"There's a good little rattler," soothes Steve Irwin in his laid-back Australian drawl. He's in America in search of rattlesnakes and "as I'm a professional herpetologist I would not like to be nipped". Viewers may recall Irwin's debut last year when he let some of the most venomous snakes in Australia lick his face. Now he's knee-deep in "the most highly evolved snakes in the world — perhaps the pinnacle of reptile evolution". He likes to get in close. "It's my way of demonstrating the beauty of these misunderstood creatures." And he prides himself on never getting bitten although the Western Diamondback can, as you'll see, strike at up to 175mph and the Mojave Rattlesnake, with venom 20 times more toxic than the Diamondback, seems to have killed a fair proportion of the population of Arizona.

Trouble at the Top: Degby Rides Again

Bull like Robbie Coltrane, the titanic businessman John Myers brooks no rivals. He has opened a new radio station in the already highly competitive North and tonight we watch how he did it. The station is temporary, Myers, an experienced broadcaster himself, is taking no chances. He floods money into it — fighting for his biggest coup, commentary rights for the Manchester United games — to the tune of £3 million. And he sacks people like there's no tomorrow. "Oh God, I hate Viagra," comments Satan. "What a stupid drug for a sex-mad species to invent." As ever, Satan is surrounded by incompetent assistants with the IQ of a Baldric. "Next time you're sacrificing a living animal to the forces of darkness, don't use a tortoise, it's not very practical."

Laughter in the House

Not just another excuse for Auntie to recycle her comedy — more a genuinely sociological look, through a three-part Omnibus special, at how television sitcom evolved, how they reflected the mores and thinking of their day and in some instances anticipated them. Go back four or five



The Australian Steve Irwin travels across the US in search of rattlesnakes (ITV, 8pm)

decades and the influence of American sitcoms, such as *I Love Lucy* and *Life with the Lyons*, was paramount. The British could enjoy them because, being American, they were classic. In those days one didn't poke fun at class. But radio was doing well with *Take It From Here* and then came Hancock who erupted the pubs with his take-off of the aspiring middle class.

Elizabeth Cowley

The Lion's Den

BBC1, 11.25pm (Northern Ireland, 12.15am)

While England international footballers proudly wear three lions on their shirts, their managers must be mindful of the journalistic lions lying in wait. Three days before the latest national coach, Kevin Keegan, watches England tackle Poland in a vital European Championship qualifier at Wembley, Brian Alexander interviews his four predecessors about the perils of the job. Bobby Robson, Graham Taylor, Terry Venables and Glenn Hoddle. It is Hoddle's second big television interview since his comments to Matt Dickinson, *The Times*' football reporter, precipitated his dismissal, and his wry relationship between media and management could be interesting.

Louise Godfrey

RADIO CHOICE

Old Harry's Game

Radio 4, 11pm

Return for a third series of the show that won "best radio comedy" at the British Comedy awards last year. That was not a universally acclaimed verdict, but *Old Harry's Game* deserved it in my view for the originality of Andy Hamilton's script (he also stars as Satan). Tonight, Hell has taken delivery of 200 men in their sixties from cities all over the US and Europe, all wearing nothing but their pyjamas and a broad smile. "Oh God, I hate Viagra," comments Satan. "What a stupid drug for a sex-mad species to invent." As ever, Satan is surrounded by incompetent assistants with the IQ of a Baldric. "Next time you're sacrificing a living animal to the forces of darkness, don't use a tortoise, it's not very practical."

RADIO 1 (BBC)

6.30am Zoo Ball 9.00 Simon Mayo 12.00 Jo Whiteley 2.00pm Mark Radcliffe 4.00 Chris Moyles 5.45 News 6.00 Dave Pearson 8.00 Steve Lamacq 10.00 Evening Session 10.00 Moby Update with Mark Kermode 10.10 John Peel 12.00 Gilles Peterson 2.00am Cive Warren 4.00 Scott Mills

RADIO 2 (BBC)

6.00am Sarah Kennedy 7.30 Wake Up to Wogan 9.30 Ken Bruce 12.00 Laila Tyack 1.00pm Anna Freston 4.00 The Sports Zone 7.00 Of Life with Sebastian Cole 8.00 The Big Issues 10.00 James May 1.00am Ian Collins

RADIO 5 LIVE (BBC)

5.00am Morning Reports 6.00 Breakfast 8.00 Nicky Campbell 12.00 The Big Breakfast with Anne Webster 1.00pm Eurosport and Co 4.00 Live with Peter Allen and Jane Garvey 7.30 News Extra. A full round-up, including a sports bulletin 7.30 John Inverdale's Football Night. Action from the football league. Plus, the National Lottery draw 10.00 Littlejohn. No-nonsense football talk on tonight's European and domestic action 11.00 Late Night Live with Nick Robinson 1.00am Up All Night

TALK RADIO

6.00am The Big Boys Breakfast 9.00 Scott Chisholm & Sally James 12.00 The Big Boys Breakfast 1.00pm The Big Boys Breakfast 2.00 The Big Boys Breakfast 3.00 The Big Boys Breakfast 4.00 The Big Boys Breakfast 5.00 The Big Boys Breakfast 6.00 The Big Boys Breakfast 7.00 The Big Boys Breakfast 8.00 The Big Boys Breakfast 9.00 The Big Boys Breakfast 10.00 The Big Boys Breakfast 11.00 The Big Boys Breakfast 12.00 The Big Boys Breakfast 1.00am The Big Boys Breakfast

VIRGIN

6.00am Chris Evans 9.30 Russ Williams 1.00pm Nick Abbot 4.00 The Virgin Radio 4.30 PM Kennedy

RADIO 3

6.00am On Air Penny Gore presents arts news and music to ease you into the day 8.00 Henry Kelly Includes the Hall of Fame Hour and CD of the Week 12.00 Lunchtime Requests. Jane Jones introduces listeners' favourite pieces of classical music 2.00pm Concerto. Lifford (Concerto for Violin No 4 in D minor) 3.00 Janine Calkins. Including information updates, Continuous Classics and Afternoon Romance 6.30 Newsnight. Headlines, arts news and guests 7.00 Smooth Classics at Seven. John Burningham introduces easy-listening sounds 8.00 Evening Concert. Bachmann (Symphony No 2 in E minor, Piano Concerto No 2 in C minor, The Rock) 11.00 Mann at Night. Music and conversation through until the small hours with Alan Mann 2.00am Concerto. Lifford (Concerto for Violin No 4 in D minor) 3.00 Mark Griffiths introduces the Early Breakfast Show

RADIO 4

5.30am World News 5.35 Shipping Forecast 5.40 Inshore Forecast 5.45 Prayer for the Day 5.47 Evening News 5.50pm News 6.00pm News 6.05pm News 6.10pm News 6.15pm News 6.20pm News 6.25pm News 6.30pm News 6.35pm News 6.40pm News 6.45pm News 6.50pm News 6.55pm News 7.00pm News 7.05pm News 7.10pm News 7.15pm News 7.20pm News 7.25pm News 7.30pm News 7.35pm News 7.40pm News 7.45pm News 7.50pm News 7.55pm News 8.00pm News 8.05pm News 8.10pm News 8.15pm News 8.20pm News 8.25pm News 8.30pm News 8.35pm News 8.40pm News 8.45pm News 8.50pm News 8.55pm News 9.00pm News 9.05pm News 9.10pm News 9.15pm News 9.20pm News 9.25pm News 9.30pm News 9.35pm News 9.40pm News 9.45pm News 9.50pm News 9.55pm News 10.00pm News 10.05pm News 10.10pm News 10.15pm News 10.20pm News 10.25pm News 10.30pm News 10.35pm News 10.40pm News 10.45pm News 10.50pm News 10.55pm News 11.00pm News 11.05pm News 11.10pm News 11.15pm News 11.20pm News 11.25pm News 11.30pm News 11.35pm News 11.40pm News 11.45pm News 11.50pm News 11.55pm 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RACING 43

Gold Cup hero
Go Ballistic
out of National

SPORT

WEDNESDAY MARCH 24 1999

MOTOR RALLYING 46

Tenacious McRae
holds on to
lead in Portugal



Injury problems fail to dampen the enthusiasm of England coach

Keegan remains positive

By OLIVER HOLT
FOOTBALL CORRESPONDENT

KEVIN KEEGAN was smiling, always smiling. Never mind the injury list, he said. Never mind that the centre of the England midfield has started to look like a dust bowl and the forward line has been cut down like Custer's cavalry on the Little Bighorn. The England coach kept on grinning.

He told an anecdote about one of his Fulham players observing that necessity was the mother of all evil. "He didn't get any marks for that," Keegan said. "Necessity is the mother of invention. You might think it is looking a bit thin but I see it in a different way."

By the end of it all, the Polish journalists who had come to the England hotel at Burnham Beeches expecting a sob story, a lament for the fading hopes of Michael Owen, were beginning to look rather downcast and Keegan was saying that he felt as excited as "a kid in a toy shop".

Managing nicely... Interface
Sherwood takes stage... 44
Brown rings changes... 44
Simon Barnes... 46

Keegan may not have taken charge of a competitive game yet, but he knows how to get his players in the right frame of mind for one. They have not kicked a ball but, so far, he has done everything as smoothly and as seamlessly as everyone imagined he would.

If his predecessor, Glenn Hoddle, could make a crisis out of a broken fingernail, Keegan breathed spirit into his squad by strapping off the worries surrounding Owen, Chris Sutton, Darren Anderson and Robbie Fowler and insisting that one man's misfortune would be another's opportunity.

He said he would have no qualms about playing Tim Sherwood and Ray Parlour, who are untested at this level, in the make-or-break European championship qualifying tie against Poland on Saturday. We could expect thrills, and probably a few spills, he said, because he knew no



Keegan makes his point forcibly to a group of England players during the training session at Bisham Abbey yesterday. Photograph: Hugh Routledge

other way. "This sort of injury thing has happened to other England managers," he said. "Why should I get away with it? I still think the squad is looking very, very good, in my true optimistic fashion."

"I look at any problem as an opportunity for somebody else. If Michael Owen does not play, it is an opportunity for

somebody else. That is simply the way you have to look at it. I have got Andy Cole and Alan Shearer left and people are saying I am down to the bare bones. They are not bad bare bones."

"By Thursday, I will know exactly who is fit and I will be able to pick a fantastic England side from that. It could be an opportunity for someone that turns out to be the best thing to have happened in this country. We are not in a crisis here but we are not in an ideal world either."

The atmosphere at Keegan's first public training session at Bisham Abbey a few hours earlier had been predictably relaxed and light-hearted. Keegan joined in the practice match, but unlike Hoddle, who always seemed intent on competing as an equal, the new manager did not take himself quite so seriously.

He smiled when he was fooled by one sweetly executed drag-back turn from Stephen Gerrard, the Liverpool youngster who has been invited to train with the squad this week. He exulted when a volley by Paul Scholes lodged in the stanchion. "Trevor Brooking in the Nip Stadium," he said.

When he was not taking part, Keegan worked with the players in groups of two, talking to them intently and working on their touch, juggling the ball with Rio Ferdinand and Ray Parlour, then with Phil Neville and Graeme Le Saux.

He did not give away many clues about the line-up, but he gave warning that David Beckham and Ray Parlour could both be in the starting XI.

It is also possible, though, that he will want to persevere with Beckham wide on the right, allowing Scholes to partner Sherwood in the middle

with McManaman on the left. The spirit of adventure, after all, is nothing new to him.

"At Newcastle," he said, "I just found myself with the kind of players who, if I asked them to defend, we would have finished fifth bottom of the league and people would have said that was good."

"Because I asked them to go forward and we lost the championship, people said it was disastrous. I am a very positive person. I was a forward and my strengths are in going that way."

"You get a coach of any team and he will start in his strengths. We have all got our strengths and weaknesses. I tend to leave the set-pieces and the defensive work to some of the people who are better qualified to do it than I am. That is just an admission that someone else can do it better."

Before he left, he finished in

the same upbeat, jaunty manner in which he had begun. This time, Alan Shearer, his captain, was the object of a ringing endorsement and a touch of jovial envy.

"I have got no qualms about Alan Shearer," Keegan said. "He has got a real strong character. You can't knock him but if you do it is at your peril because he is likely to bounce back and prove you wrong."

"That is what great players do. They keep doing it, week in, week out. They get criticised for being just good because people are used to them being exceptionally good or brilliant. I know him, I know what I am going to get from him. People have even asked me if he needs cheering up. Well, I cheered him up yesterday when I missed a three-foot putt on the 17th. He was doing cartwheels."

Lloyd leaving after the World Cup

By JOHN STERN

DAVID LLOYD is to step down from his post as England coach after the World Cup in June. Lloyd's decision, first disclosed in *The Times* on Boxing Day, comes five days before he and a 15-man England squad travel to Lahore and then Sharjah for a pre-World Cup triangular series against India and Pakistan. It was always his intention to leave after the World Cup, but privately he has felt that support for him at the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has ebbed away.

Relations have been strained since last August when he was reprimanded for his comments about the bowling action of Muttiah Muralitharan, the Sri Lanka off-spinner, who took 16 England wickets at the Oval.

Lloyd, 52, whose contract was not due to expire until after the four-match Test series against New Zealand in July and August, has had a number of meetings with Lord MacLaurin of Knebworth, the ECB chairman, and Simon Pack, the international teams director, over the past fortnight. He sought assurances about his future, which the ECB could not offer, but his departure was concluded in "entirely amicable circumstances", according to a statement from the board yesterday morning.

Lloyd, who has been approached by television companies to begin his career as a commentator again, said: "I had to think of safeguarding my own future and I was anxious to avoid speculation during the World Cup and distracting the team. I've had a tremendous week and I look forward to completing my tenure with a successful World Cup campaign."

Before becoming England coach at the start of the 1996 season, he was a regular and popular member of BBC Radio's *Test Match Special* team and may now be offered a role with Sky Sports or Channel 4.

Despite a patchy record, he has remained popular with and respected by the players. He guided England to their first win in a five-Test series for 12 years against South Africa last summer. Alec Stewart, the England captain, said: "It's disappointing news, but it's been a pleasure to work with 'Bumble', a coach who is

thorough, loyal to his players and completely professional. He has brought passion to the job and it would be great to reward him with the World Cup as a final voice of thanks from the players."

Lloyd can also be credited with dragging the preparation and training of England teams out of the dark ages with his emphasis on fitness consultants and other specialist coaches. "We owe David a huge debt," MacLaurin said. "During his time, he has introduced many innovations which mean that we are now world leaders in several aspects of our approach to the game at international level."

Lloyd's passion for the game, though, has landed him into trouble with the ECB on more than one occasion. In addition to the Muralitharan comments last summer, he



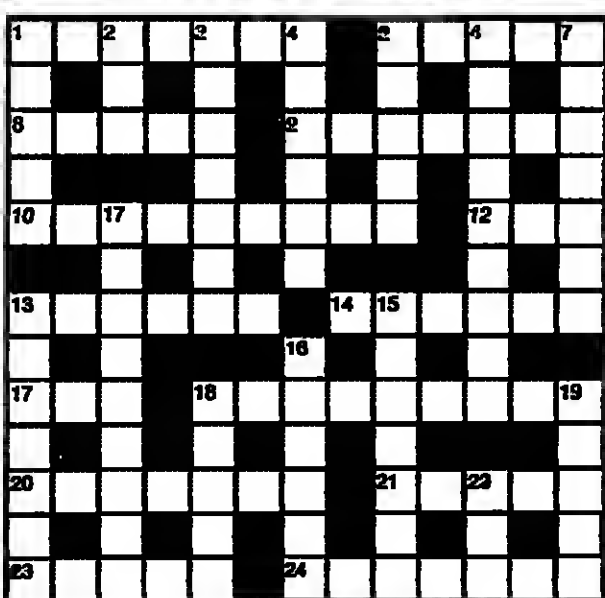
Lloyd: popular

was censured for saying, after a drawn Test in Zimbabwe three winters ago, that "we flip-pin' murdered 'em".

On the winter tour to Australia, Lloyd was heard less and less publicly as Graham Gooch, the tour manager and a selector, tended to take much of the media responsibility.

The obvious candidate to replace Lloyd would be Bob Woolmer, whose position as coach of South Africa also terminates after the World Cup. However, Woolmer, who has had great success with both South Africa and, before, Warwickshire, has often said that he would not be interested in another international coaching job. Gooch and Mike Gatting, another selector, will also be in the frame, although the ECB may look overseas.

Moody called up, page 42

TIMES TWO
CROSSWORD

No 1673

ACROSS

- 1 Round-top loaf (7)
- 5 Love god (5)
- 8 (Cook in) vapour (5)
- 9 Makes up (7)
- 10 Deformed (9)
- 12 Nocturnal bird (3)
- 13 Maximum (6)
- 14 One living with bloom along the bough (*Housman*) (6)
- 17 Uncultured youth (3)
- 18 Mundane, everyday (5)
- 20 Unusual: for particular purpose (7)
- 21 Kashmir river (5)
- 23 Cui of beef (5)
- 24 Period of George III's incapacity (7)

DOWN

- 1 Twig broom (5)
- 2 Bravo! (Sp.) (3)
- 3 Elvis's home town (7)
- 4 Cooking instructions (6)
- 5 Unperfumed (5)
- 6 Perfumed mixture: medley (3-6)
- 7 Exhibition (7)
- 11 A long note (9)
- 13 Bloom its hero (*Joyce*) (7)
- 15 Calling: dropping stones (7)
- 16 Type of monkey: one crying loudly (6)
- 18 Rapid; intelligent (5)
- 19 Unpleasant (5)
- 22 Spaniard: Russian river (3)

SOLUTION TO NO 1672

- ACROSS: 2 Constant 6 Poncho 8 Terror 9 Lenient
10 Value 12 Disclaim 16 Dilettante 18 Loner 20 Brittle
21 Cookie 22 Sesame 23 Shingles
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7 Coincidence 11 Arkansas 13 Matress 14 Ptolemy
15 Glacier 17 Irving 19 Naomi

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